

**Influence of Leadership Styles on Operational Excellence of Airline
Industry in Kenya**

Judy Munene

138769

**Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for The Degree Of
Master Of Business Administration of Strathmore Business School, Strathmore
University**



**Strathmore Business School
Strathmore University
Nairobi, Kenya**

May 2025

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself.

© No part of this dissertation may be reproduced without the permission of the author and Strathmore University

Name of Candidate; Judy Munene

Approval

The dissertation of Judy Munene was approved by the following:

Name of Supervisor:

School/Institute/Faculty:

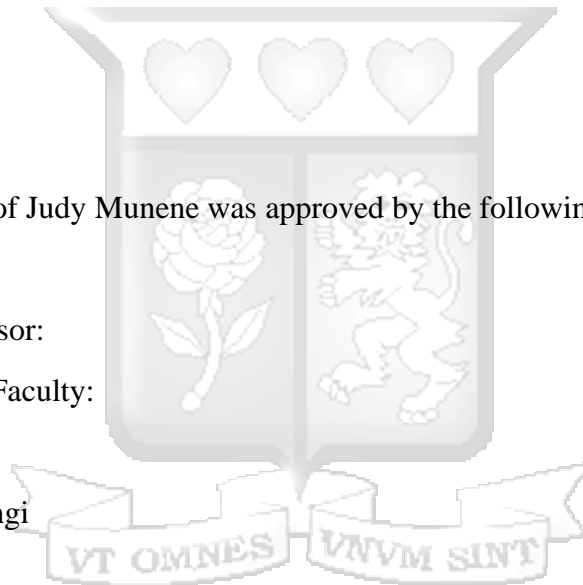
Dr. Ceaser Mwangi

Executive Dean

Strathmore University Business School.

Prof. Bernard Shibwabo

Director, Office of Graduate Studies



DEDICATION

To my dear children Valerie, Leo, and Melannie, this dissertation is dedicated to you as a reminder that with hard work, perseverance, and self-belief, dreams can become reality. May you always strive for greatness, knowing that anything is possible.

To my mum and dad, thank you for your unwavering love, sacrifices, and belief in me. Dad, you challenged me to return to school and reignited my ambition; Mum, your quiet strength and constant prayers carried me through.

I couldn't have done this without each of you.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am deeply grateful to the Almighty God for His constant strength, guidance, and provision throughout my studies. His grace has been my foundation every step of the way.

I sincerely appreciate Strathmore Business School for giving me the opportunity to study in such a distinguished institution. I am especially grateful to the dedicated and knowledgeable lecturers whose expertise has helped shape me into a better student and a lifelong learner.

A special thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Ben Ngoye, for his invaluable guidance, timely feedback, and unwavering support. Your insights and encouragement have been instrumental in this journey.

To my classmates, thank you for your encouragement, support, and the shared experiences that made this journey worthwhile. Your resilience and camaraderie pushed me to stay focused and determined to reach this milestone.

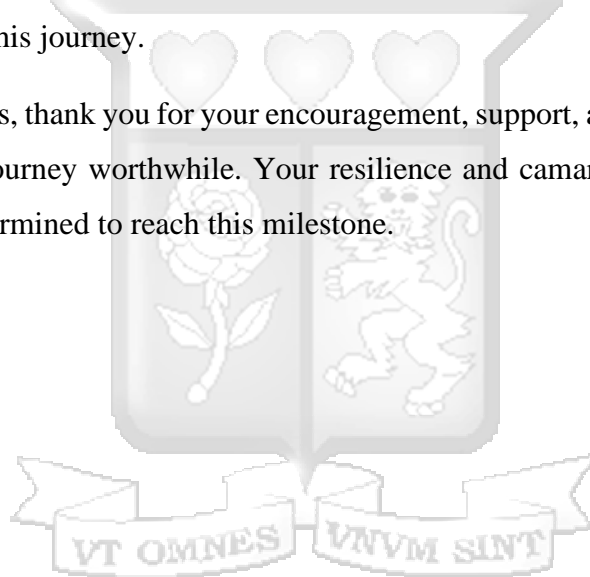
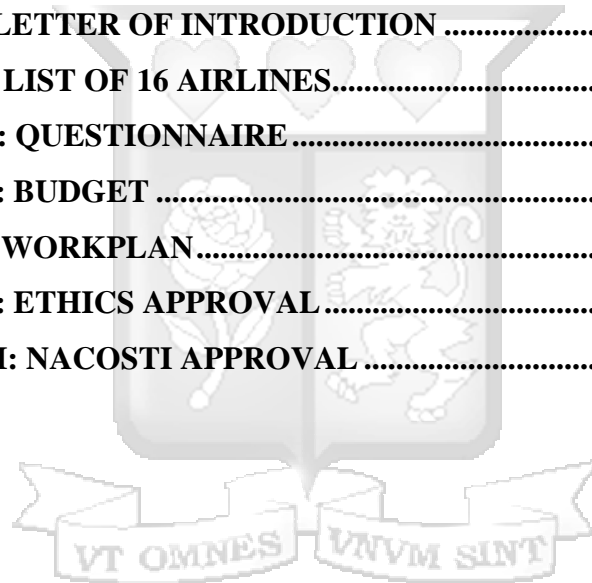


TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	iv
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
ACRONYMS	x
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
1.0 Background: The Pursuit of Excellence in Business.....	1
1.1.1 Operational Excellence	2
1.2 The Airline Industry in Kenya.....	3
1.3 Operational Excellence in the Air Travel Industry in Kenya	4
1.4 Justification for selected operational excellence indicators	6
1.5 Problem Statement	6
1.6 Research Objectives	8
1.6.1 Research Objectives.....	8
1.6.2 Research Questions.....	8
1.7 Significance of Study	9
1.7.1 Management of Kenya Air Travel Operators	9
1.7.2 Policy Makers in the Air Travel Industry	9
1.7.3 Bodies and Investors in the Aviation Industry.....	10
1.7.4 Air Travel Agents	10
1.7.5 Future Researchers.....	10
1.8 Scope of the Study.....	11
1.9 Chapter Summary	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.1.1 Leadership Styles	12

2.2 Theoretical Literature Review	14
2.2.1 Behavioral Leadership Theory.....	14
2.3 Empirical Literature Review	15
2.3.1 Transactional Leadership.....	16
2.3.2 Laissez-faire Leadership.....	17
2.3.3 Transformational Leadership.....	19
2.4 Synthesis and Research Gap.....	21
2.5 Conceptual Framework	22
2.6 Operationalization of Variables.....	25
2.7 Chapter Summary.....	27
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	28
3.1 Introduction	28
3.2 Research Design	28
3.2.1 Population for the Study	28
3.3 Sampling Technique for the Study	29
3.4 Data Collection Methods.....	30
3.5 Research Quality- Validity and Reliability	31
3.5.1 Validity	31
3.5.2 Reliability.....	32
3.6 Data Analysis	32
3.7 Ethical Consideration	33
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	34
4.0 Introduction	34
4.1 Presentation of Findings.....	34
4.1.1 Description of the Full Survey Data	35
4.1.2 Reliability Analysis.....	39
4.2 Analysis and Interpretation of Findings	42
4.2.1 Relationships Between Variables	43
4.3 Relating Results to Existing Literature	46
4.3.1 Transformational Leadership.....	46

4.3.2 Laissez-Faire Leadership	47
4.3.3 Transactional Leadership.....	47
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION....	49
5.1 Introduction	49
5.2 Summary of Key Findings	49
5.3 Conclusion.....	50
5.4 Limitations of the Study	50
5.5 Recommendations	51
5.6 Chapter Summary	53
REFERENCES.....	54
APPENDIX I: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION	64
APPENDIX II: LIST OF 16 AIRLINES.....	66
APPENDIX III: QUESTIONNAIRE	67
APPENDIX IV: BUDGET	71
APPENDIX V: WORKPLAN.....	72
APPENDIX VI: ETHICS APPROVAL	73
APPENDIX VII: NACOSTI APPROVAL	74



LIST OF TABLES

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework	24
Table 2.1: Operationalization of Variables	25



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Area of Expertise	37
Figure 2 Age Distribution	38
Figure 3 Education level	39
Figure 4 Transformational Leadership Scale - Cronbach's Alpha.....	40
Figure 5 Laissez-Faire Leadership Scale - Cronbach's Alpha.....	41
Figure 6 Transactional Leadership Scale - Cronbach's Alpha.....	42
Figure 7 : Correlation analysis	44



ACRONYMS

AFRAA	African Airlines Association
JIT	Just-In-Time
JKIA	Jomo Kenyatta International Airport
KCAA	Kenya Civil Aviation Authority
KQ	Kenya Airways
TQM	Total Quality Management
OE	Operations Excellence
IATA	International Air Transport Association
OTP	On Time Performance
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
SAATM	Single African Air Transport Market



ABSTRACT

The Kenyan aviation industry endures lasting difficulties because advanced business approaches from foreign airlines cause weak points that threaten home-based airline longevity. Survival and achievement of success in such conditions demands top leadership together with innovative operational strategies. The research investigates the impact of transformational as well as transactional leadership styles together with laissez-faire leadership on operational excellence among IATA accredited international airlines with offices in Kenya. Operational excellence assessment utilizes multiple indicators such as customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, customer loyalty and minimal flight cancellation. The researchers conducted cross-sectional quantitative research through structured questionnaires derived from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X). The research data was received from 90 frontline managers working in IATA accredited international airlines with offices in Kenya and the statistical analysis was conducted through SPSS. The analysis employed descriptive statistics to summarize demographic data and used Pearson correlation to examine the relationships between leadership styles and operational excellence. The outcomes demonstrate that transformational and transactional leadership styles produce positive effects on operational performance, but laissez-faire leadership generates limited to no significant correlation. The study benefits airline managers and policymakers as well as scholars thanks to its demonstration of leadership importance in operational enhancements. The research presents several practical suggestions for aviation sector leadership development and strategic decision-making specifically for the Kenyan environment.



CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Background: The Pursuit of Excellence in Business

In the contemporary business environment, organizations are perpetually striving for superior performance and sustained competitive advantage, leading them to explore diverse methodologies for attaining business excellence (Mustun, 2021). The pursuit of business excellence is a long-standing endeavor, marked by the continuous refinement of strategies and approaches across several decades (Buntak et al., 2017). Initially, the primary emphasis was on product and service quality, drawing inspiration from Japanese manufacturing practices and subsequently formalized through prestigious accolades such as the Deming Prize (El-Haik & Mekki, 2008). This initial focus on quality served as a foundation for more comprehensive strategies, most notably Total Quality Management, which gained considerable traction in the 1980s and 1990s (Shehadeh et al., 2016). TQM advocated for organization-wide engagement to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, emphasizing that every facet of the business should contribute to enhancing quality and efficiency. Over time, businesses came to understand that true excellence encompassed more than just quality and customer service, which led to the emergence of operational excellence as a crucial strategy for reliably and consistently executing business strategies (Shehadeh et al., 2016). Frameworks like the EFQM Excellence Model were developed to provide organizations with a structured approach to understanding the complex interdependencies between their actions and outcomes (Kovilage et al., 2022). These frameworks typically emphasize the importance of balancing the needs of all stakeholders while simultaneously promoting a culture of continuous improvement (Sony, 2019). According to McKinsey & Company, operational excellence is achieved through the application of best practices, which ultimately results in reduced operational risk, lower operating costs, and increased revenues relative to the competition (Kovilage et al., 2022). Business excellence can be viewed as an overarching organizational philosophy that aims for superior performance across all aspects of the organization (Kovilage et al., 2022). Operational excellence, in turn, serves as a critical enabler of business excellence, focusing on the consistent and

reliable execution of business strategies (Kovilage et al., 2022). It involves optimizing processes to maximize value for customers (Kovilage et al., 2022). Achieving operational excellence requires a collaborative effort from everyone in the organization, hence leadership is the driving force behind both business and operational excellence (Botha, 2016). Committed leaders set the vision, create a culture of excellence, and ensure alignment with organizational goals (Mitchell, 2015). Effective leadership also entails fostering a positive working culture and promoting individual and collective ownership for success (Mitchell, 2015). The Critical Success Factors of operational excellence include leadership, people management, continuous improvement, operational strategy, and asset optimization (Osman, Mohammad, Yusof, & Chelliapan, 2021). Senior executives and operating leaders must be totally committed and convey a vivid picture of why operational excellence is essential (Mitchell, 2015). In an increasingly competitive global landscape, operational excellence is not merely an aspirational goal but a critical imperative for businesses seeking to thrive and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage (Jaeger et al., 2014).

1.1.1 Operational Excellence

In the dynamic landscape of modern business, organizations continuously seek avenues to achieve excellence, with operational excellence emerging as a critical strategy (Nelis, 2014). Operational excellence can be defined as organizations making improvements to attain a competitive advantage, prioritizing not only organizational benefits but also the needs of customers and other stakeholders (Sony, 2019). In today's global and competitive environment, organizations must rethink and reshape their approach to execution to stay competitive (Kovilage et al., 2022). According to George (2002) operational excellence serves as the strategic initiative under which this process can take shape. Organizations pursuing operational excellence continuously strive to increase employee engagement, education, and empowerment through strong values, guiding principles, leadership development, coaching, and continuous competence development.

In the context of airlines, operational excellence is crucial for maintaining a competitive advantage and ensuring customer satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2023).

Airlines are constantly seeking ways to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance service quality (Zhang et al., 2023). However, traditional key performance indicators like On-Time Performance and Technical Dispatch Reliability, while important, may not provide sufficient insight into the processes causing disruptions (Sedláček & Sauer, 2020). According to the Shingo Model Handbook, operational excellence is a consequence of an enterprise-wide practice of ideal behavior based on correct principles. It emphasizes that true operational excellence involves aligning leadership, management, and organizational behaviours with guiding principles that foster continuous improvement, value creation, and cultural transformation. Operational Excellence accelerates competitive advantages and profitability through amplified efficiencies and returns on investment. It employs the best practices, develops capable employees, and aims for continuous improvement, quality, and customer satisfaction (Snee & Hoerl, 2007). To successfully implement operational excellence, organizations might adapt to more systematic and structured ways to respond to the dynamics of the corporate environment and customer needs (Kovilage et al., 2022).

1.2 The Airline Industry in Kenya

Cook and Billing (2017) argue that the global airline industry is a vital component of the world economy, particularly through its air transportation network. Aviation offers the only rapid, long-distance travel option, making it crucial for global business and tourism. A study by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) revealed that air transportation drives economic growth, creates jobs, enhances living standards, reduces poverty, and boosts tax revenues by supporting tourism and trade (ABBB, 2018). However, the significance of air transport in Africa has long been hindered by inadequate or absent surface transportation, which has slowed economic development. Recently, the expansion of airline services has provided a catalyst for growth following decades of stagnation. Kenya's economy is significantly dependent on the travel industry to connect with the global economy, making it a key focus in Vision 2030. The country's travel industry encompasses various modes of transport, including railway transport (such as the Standard Gauge Railway - SGR), road transport (including Matatus, motorbike carriers - Bodabodas), courier services, cargo shipping, private vehicles, air travel, pipeline transport, water transport, and the tourism sector, among others (Zakayo, 2017). According to data from KNBS (2022), prior to the

COVID-19 pandemic, the transport and storage sector contributed Ksh 2.3 trillion to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), an increase from Ksh 2.0 trillion in the previous year. The value of air transport also rose from Ksh 111 billion to Ksh 134 billion following the reopening of the economy after the easing of COVID-19 containment measures. The travel industry creates over fifteen million job opportunities globally. In Kenya, the air travel sector supported over 410,000 jobs in 2019 before being hit by the Covid-19 pandemic containment measures that lead to cessation of movement and closing of many businesses (KNBS, 2021). Of these total figures, approximately 15,000 jobs are directly within the air travel sector, 96,000 are part of its supply chain, and 43,000 are linked to employee spending. The tourism sector, closely tied to the industry, contributes a significant 257,000 jobs. It generates an average revenue of around \$3.2 billion in gross value added to Kenya's GDP, representing a 4.6% growth in the country's gross domestic product, driven collectively by air transport and tourists arriving in Kenya by air (Bora, 2019). However, the sector has shown robust recovery after easing Covid-19 restrictions and re-opening of the economy together with other allied industries that depend on it. As mentioned on IATA (2025) Kenya Airways is the primary IATA member based in Kenya, many other international IATA-member airlines operate flights to and from Kenya and thus have offices or representation in the country.

1.3 Operational Excellence in the Air Travel Industry in Kenya

International Air Transport Association (IATA) now represents some 340 airlines in over 120 countries (IATA, 2025). Air travel is a heavily regulated industry and is perceived as one of the fastest and safest modes of transport. Research findings presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) show that on an annual basis, the air travel industry generates about \$3.5 trillion in global economy (IATA, 2020). The IATA article highlights key challenges facing African airlines, including low profit margins, infrastructure deficiencies, high operational costs, onerous taxes, and limited airspace liberalization due to poor implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM). Despite a projected \$100 million net profit, African airlines' earnings remain well below the global benchmark, with profits of just 90 cents per passenger compared to the global \$6.14. IATA's Focus Africa initiative aims to address these hurdles by improving safety, infrastructure,

connectivity, finance, sustainability, and skill development (African Airlines Challenges Not Insurmountable: Profit Sits Below Global Benchmark, 2024). The Kenyan airline industry struggles with operational excellence, which is evident in several key areas. Customer satisfaction remains a challenge, as airlines grapple with meeting rising customer expectations in a competitive market (Meyer & Mostert, 2011; Pereira et al., 2023). Airlines need to manage passenger relations effectively to guarantee and retain customer satisfaction (Pereira et al., 2023). Customer loyalty is also an area of concern, as airlines need to build long-term relationships with passengers to ensure repeat business (Meyer & Mostert, 2011). To achieve this, airlines should offer high levels of service and ensure passengers are satisfied (Meyer & Mostert, 2011). Employee satisfaction, crucial for service delivery, requires attention to improve staff professionalism, communication, and resources (Stanley, 2013). Finally, minimizing flight cancellations, a direct reflection of operational efficiency, is essential for maintaining customer trust and minimizing disruptions (Farah et al., 2018). According to (Farah et al., 2018), the challenges being faced in the Kenyan airline industry include the need for skilled human resources.

Kenya Airways plays a significant role in both passenger and cargo transportation within the region. In 2022, the airline carried over 3.7 million passengers and transported over 70,000 tons of cargo. The airline is also exploring strategies to increase its cargo business, including leasing dedicated cargo aircraft to grow its freight segment. IATA takes a leading role in enhancement of airlines performance not only in Kenya, but also around the world. In this sense, it ensures that it puts operational strategies that help mitigate challenges facing airlines around the world today (Bora, 2019). According to Sun et al. (2022), such aspects as cost control, predator actions by major airlines, access to capital markets, retrogressive policies, poor airport infrastructure, terrorism, high fuel prices issues, unfair competition, and globalization are some of the aspects that IATA has been able to handle using leadership and operations streamlining strategies in the past. Leadership needs have been presented as vital in ensuring better operational performance of the industry. Passengers are also able to use self-service technology to create efficiency in search, reservation, and purchase of flights thus saving time and money. Some studies indicate that airlines save high costs per passenger with self-service check-in, and customers

experience almost zero waiting times (Choi et al., 2024). The sector emphasizes environmental care and protection as part of corporate social responsibility. There is need for better policies and leadership approaches that guarantee activities aimed at ensuring environmental conservation in Kenya, as well as strategies to holistically promote better corporate responsibilities that will end up promoting loyalty, better relations with locals and foreign travelers, and holistic facilitation of international trade via air travel (Bora, 2019).

1.4 Justification for selected operational excellence indicators

These are key indicators used for operational excellence in the airline industry, as particularly relevant in the context of Kenyan airlines (Kimathi, 2024). Customer satisfaction reflects an airline's success in fulfilling passenger expectations regarding service quality and overall experience (Bhuvaneshwaran et al., 2018; Pereira et al., 2023), crucial for survival in a competitive market (Stanley, 2013). As Chen and Chang highlight, investments in passenger comfort and personalized services significantly improve satisfaction scores. Customer loyalty builds upon satisfaction, emphasizing passengers' continued preference for an airline and indicating strong, lasting relationships (Pereira et al., 2023). Loyalty programs, quality service, and consistent performance are essential for fostering this loyalty. Engaged and motivated employees, reflected in employee satisfaction, directly contribute to providing excellent service and ensuring operational efficiency (Kovilage et al., 2022). Pugh et al. demonstrate that higher employee satisfaction leads to improved customer interactions and better service quality. Finally, minimizing flight cancellations is critical for maintaining operational efficiency, adhering to schedules, avoiding disruptions, reducing costs, and protecting the airline's reputation (Kimathi, 2024). Schedule adherence is closely linked to operational excellence. By prioritizing these indicators, airlines can enhance customer experiences, profitability, and market position (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013).

1.5 Problem Statement

Operational excellence is critical for success and sustainability in the highly competitive aviation industry (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013), enabling airlines to optimize resource utilization, enhance customer satisfaction, and maintain a competitive edge

(SOMBA, 2023). Researchers have explored its implementation and impact in various global contexts. Studies have examined operational excellence in countries such as Sudan, Malaysia, and the United States (Yayla-Küllü & Tansitpong, 2013), while global surveys have assessed operational excellence practices in airlines worldwide. These studies often highlight the importance of factors like process optimization, technology adoption, and employee training in achieving operational excellence. However, a significant gap exists in the literature concerning the direct and nuanced relationship between leadership styles and the successful implementation of operational excellence initiatives, specifically within the Kenyan aviation sector. While the importance of leadership for overall organizational performance in the airline industry has been broadly recognized (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013) and the impact of leadership conduct and skills on strategy execution in Kenyan airlines has been explored (ZAKAYO, 2017), there is a lack of focused, empirical research on how different leadership styles (transformational, laissez-faire, and transactional) directly influence the pursuit, implementation, and ultimate attainment of operational excellence within Kenyan airlines. This gap is particularly concerning because effective leadership is crucial for navigating the complexities of the aviation industry and driving the changes necessary for operational improvement. Understanding how different leadership approaches either facilitate or hinder operational excellence is essential for developing targeted interventions and leadership development programs. This is particularly relevant considering the unique operational and strategic challenges faced by Kenyan airlines. The Kenyan aviation industry faces specific challenges related to cost leadership, differentiation, and competitive strategies (SOMBA, 2023), as well as the need for innovation to drive revenue growth and enhance brand reputation. These challenges are further compounded by issues such as financial difficulties, system failures, and customer engagement issues (Farah et al., 2018), some of which have been directly or indirectly linked to leadership styles and ineffective strategy execution (ZAKAYO, 2017).

These challenges are further compounded by issues such as financial difficulties, system failures, and customer engagement issues (Farah et al., 2018), some of which have been directly or indirectly linked to leadership styles and ineffective strategy execution (ZAKAYO, 2017). Moreover, the role of frontline leadership in driving

operational excellence (encompassing efficiency, safety, customer service, and innovation) within this specific context remains underexplored. It is essential to understand how leaders at all levels can contribute to a culture of operational excellence. Addressing this gap is critical for several reasons. First, it can inform the development of leadership practices and strategies that are specifically tailored to the Kenyan aviation context, taking into account its unique challenges and opportunities. Second, it can contribute to improved airline performance, enhanced service delivery, and a stronger culture of continuous improvement (Stanley, 2013). Finally, by fostering operational excellence, Kenyan airlines can improve their competitiveness and contribute to the sustainable development of the industry, supporting broader economic goals. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the influence of transformational, laissez-faire, and transactional leadership styles on operational excellence within international airlines operating in Kenya. By examining this relationship, the study aims to provide actionable insights for airline managers and policymakers, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of the Kenyan aviation sector.

1.6 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to study the influence of leadership styles on operational excellence of airline industry in Kenya.

1.6.1 Research Objectives

The specific objectives will include:

- i. To explore the effect of transformational leadership style on operational excellence in the airline industry in Kenya.
- ii. To determine the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on operational excellence in the airline industry in Kenya.
- iii. To explore the influence of transactional leadership on operational excellence in the airline industry in Kenya.

1.6.2 Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the research study:

- i. To what extent does transformational leadership styles affect operational excellence of the Kenya airline industry in Kenya?
- ii. Does the use of laissez-faire leadership styles influence the operational excellence of the Kenya airline industry in Kenya?
- iii. To what extent does transactional leadership styles influence the operational excellence in the Kenya airline industry in Kenya?

1.7 Significance of Study

This study focus will be of paramount significance to the following stakeholders:

1.7.1 Management of Kenya Air Travel Operators

Frontline managers are employees in managerial positions who supervise the day-to-day operations and directly manage staff members engaged in the core activities of a business or organization (Yukl, 2013). Managers in the air travel industry have been facing multiple challenges in ensuring that the sector thrives in terms of operational performance, productivity, market, and financial growth (IATA, 2021; ICAO, 2020). In this sense, we should understand the operational strategic factors that such managers are likely to incur in the air travel sector. Leadership and strategic planning will be crucial in enabling managers to make informed decisions and apply appropriate leadership strategies across different areas of Kenya's air travel sector. This will allow managers to better understand the challenges that have hindered operational excellence in the industry. Factors such as the economic disruptions caused by COVID-19, past leadership shortcomings, operational inconsistencies, and other related issues will be analyzed to improve future performance.

1.7.2 Policy Makers in the Air Travel Industry

The findings from this research will be essential in establishing a foundation for future air travel policies. Developing informed policies is crucial to addressing the operational inconsistencies currently faced by the industry. These policies will serve as guidelines for achieving resource optimization, profitability, and enhanced customer satisfaction, ultimately helping to elevate the industry in line with the economic goals outlined in Vision 2030.

1.7.3 Bodies and Investors in the Aviation Industry

The insights gained from this research will be crucial for airline management in identifying effective strategies and leadership approaches to improve customer satisfaction, employee productivity, operational efficiency, and the overall achievement of business objectives. Organizations like AFRAA, KCAA, and IATA will gain a better understanding of the support needed by airlines in Kenya, as well as the necessary leadership and operations training to foster the adoption of effective leadership styles and strategy development. Additionally, this research will serve as a valuable reference for both current and potential investors interested in the Kenyan air travel industry, providing key information on leadership trends, industry challenges, and the sector's potential for economic and operational success.

1.7.4 Air Travel Agents

Travel agents are a vital part of the air travel industry, and this research will be crucial in helping them understand the leadership, operational, technological, and innovative strategies needed to optimize the sector's structure and framework, ultimately driving profitability. In partnership with regulatory and management bodies such as IATA, travel agents will gain insights into how to effectively manage travel bookings and connect their clients with the most suitable airlines, fostering stable and long-term relationships with their customers.

1.7.5 Future Researchers

As a scholarly industry study, the findings will contribute to strengthening future research in the commercial air travel sector. Future researchers will gain insights into emerging factors that impact the success or failure of the industry, enabling them to conduct further studies and generate ideas on how to better integrate leadership and operational strategy planning to enhance productivity, growth, and operational excellence. This research will serve as a valuable reference for international researchers working to improve leadership practices and strategic factors that drive organizational growth and efficiency.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between leadership styles and operational excellence measured by customer satisfaction, employee's satisfaction, customer loyalty and minimal cancellation of flights. Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire, specifically the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X) (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The MLQ 5X is a widely recognized and validated instrument for measuring transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Batista-Foguet et al., 2021; Lani, 2010). The sample for this study will consist of frontline employees who are airline supervisors in various departments such as flight operations, ground operations, commercial and customer service, safety, compliance and quality assurance as well as supervisors working under information technology department, human resources, communications amongst others. The study will stratify these study participants into their respective departments and select specific samples through a random sampling technique to ensure the sample is representative and can be generalized. The scope of this study is limited to Kenya with IATA accredited international airlines with offices in Nairobi. The findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of leadership styles in the airline industry within Kenya. Rather than focusing on a single airline, the research investigates how past leadership decisions have influenced the industry and identifies the factors that have hindered its ability to reach its full potential in terms of economic growth and operational excellence.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided background of the study, provided a link between leadership styles and operational excellence, presented the research problems and objectives of the study. It also provided research questions, significance, and scope of the study. The next chapter provides the theoretical and empirical literature review and the operationalization of the variables.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review. In this section of the proposal, an in-depth analysis of existing literature on the influence of leadership styles on operational excellence is provided. A comprehensive review of peer-reviewed materials on each of the variables of the topic is done to determine the research gaps. Also provided is the theoretical framework that will guide this study.

2.1.1 Leadership Styles

Leadership theory has evolved significantly, with different schools of thought gaining prominence over time (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Early theories focused on the characteristics of leaders, while later theories considered the role of followers and the context (Dinibutun, 2020). The "Great Man" approach, a subset of trait theory, suggested that leaders are born with inherent qualities that make them suited for leadership roles (Dinibutun, 2020). Within this framework, two common leadership styles emerged. Autocratic leaders centralize authority and decision-making, maintaining strict control over their subordinates. Democratic leaders involve their subordinates in decision-making, fostering a more participatory environment (Shahin et al., 2024). The behavioral approach laid the groundwork for later leadership theories, including transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership (Keskes, 2014) (Kibbe, 2019). Key leadership styles identified within behavioral theory include, transformational leadership which inspires and motivates followers to achieve higher levels of performance and commitment (Keskes, 2014). These leaders create a shared vision and inspire followers to transcend their self-interests (Alessa, 2021). Examples of transformational leaders include Steve Jobs and Jeff Bezos (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Transactional leadership involves an exchange between leaders and followers (Keskes, 2014). Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by a hands-off approach, where leaders delegate decision-making to followers and avoid taking responsibility (2023). This style is generally considered the least effective (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). As a result, leadership has been defined through various aspects, including traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and the holding of an administrative position (Fennell, 2021). Miller

(2019) states that a key indicator of leadership effectiveness is the degree to which team or organizational performance is improved, and the achievement of goals is supported. Different industries and organization settings may influence the use of different leadership styles for optimal outcomes such as organizational productivity, operational performance, employee behaviors, and organizational culture (Northouse, 2018). Leadership style has been referred to as regular pattern of behaviors from the organizational leaders when dealing with other staff (Bwalya, 2023). These behaviors shape the organizational operations and culture and may spillover to affect the company operations (Tedla, 2016). Leadership is intrinsically linked to operational performance, as strategic decision-making, resource utilization and mobilization, and the fostering of teamwork and collaboration are heavily influenced by the leadership in place (Mitchell, 2015). According to Yildiz (2016), a leader is someone who can guide a group toward the achievement of a specific goal. Strategy execution and operational excellence, therefore, depend significantly on the leaders in each sector. It is the leader's responsibility to determine the most effective style and approach for achieving goals in a cost-efficient and highly efficient manner. Leaders must also select a strong, committed team, assign the right roles, and align strategic objectives with available resources. Leadership plays a crucial role in achieving business excellence. Different leadership styles can have a significant impact on organizational performance (Khajeh, 2018). Modern leaders need to be aware of the complexities that affect their organization in order to maximize leadership effectiveness and, subsequently, organizational performance (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013). The airline industry, especially in Africa, continues to underperform, contributed by inadequate leadership, liberalization of airspace, slow economic performance, and often high cost of operations. In many African countries such as Kenya, airlines are known for loss-making and often survive on government bailouts (Farah et al., 2018). Scholars argue that organizational culture, leadership approaches, technology, innovations, and organizational culture affect organizational activities, hence affecting profitability and operational excellence (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013; SOMBA 2023)

2.2 Theoretical Literature Review

2.2.1 Behavioral Leadership Theory

Behavioral theory asserts that leadership is a set of learned behaviors rather than innate traits, positioning leadership as a skill that can be cultivated through training and experience (Northouse, 2018). This perspective emerged in opposition to trait-based theories, suggesting that effective leadership is not about who you are, but about what you do. Seminal research underpinning this view includes the Ohio State leadership studies, which aim to identify observable behaviors that distinguish effective leaders. These studies identified two primary dimensions of leader behavior: initiating structure and consideration (Northouse, 2018). Initiating structure refers to task-oriented behaviors, such as defining roles, organizing work, and setting performance goals, which are essential for achieving organizational outcomes. In contrast, consideration includes people-oriented behaviors, such as showing concern for subordinates, building trust, and fostering team cohesion, reflecting a leader's attention to the interpersonal aspects of leadership (Papazafirooulos, 2013). Fleishman (1953) emphasized that the most successful leaders balance both behaviors by adapting to the needs of the task and the individuals involved, reinforcing the behavioral theory's central tenet that leadership effectiveness is situational and adaptive. Parallel to this, the University of Michigan conducted studies that conceptualized leadership along the spectrum of employee-centered and job-centered orientations (Zeerak, 2023). Employee-centered leaders focused on developing subordinates, fostering collaboration, and supporting individual well-being, while job-centered leaders emphasized supervision, performance, and standardized processes. Likert (1963) found that employee-centered leadership not only enhanced job satisfaction but also improved productivity, highlighting the positive organizational impact of relational leadership behaviors. These findings complement the Ohio State research by reinforcing the importance of balancing task execution with concern for people.

Despite the valuable insights offered by behavioral theories, they have been criticized for overlooking the significance of context. Benmira and Agboola (2021) argue that effective leadership requires behavioral flexibility, which cannot be captured by static behavior categories. Northouse (2018) supports this, noting that rigidly applying

certain leadership behaviors without accounting for situational variables may hinder effectiveness, thereby calling for an integrative approach that incorporates both behavior and context. Leadership styles can also be analyzed along spectrums that distinguish between control-based and influence-based approaches. Control-based styles include autocratic and bureaucratic leadership, where decision-making authority is centralized, and adherence to rules and procedures is paramount (Bass, 1990; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Yukl, 2013). Autocratic leaders typically make unilateral decisions and provide clear directives, which may be effective in crisis situations but often suppress employee morale and creativity (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013). Similarly, bureaucratic leadership, as described by Weber (1947), emphasizes consistency and fairness through hierarchical rules, but it often results in organizational rigidity and slow adaptability. In contrast, influence-based styles such as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership prioritize motivational strategies and employee engagement. Transformational leaders inspire change through charisma, shared vision, and emotional appeal, often driving innovation and deep commitment among followers (Bass, 1999; Papazafiroopoulos, 2013). Transactional leaders, on the other hand, manage through contingent rewards and performance-based discipline, which can effectively ensure short-term efficiency but lacks the emotional engagement necessary for long-term motivation (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by minimal supervision and high delegation, can be effective with highly capable and autonomous teams but risks disengagement and confusion in less structured environments (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013). Taken together, behavioral theories and leadership spectrums demonstrate that leadership is not a monolith but a set of adaptive, observable behaviors that can be shaped by training and molded to fit different organizational needs (Zakayo, 2017). However, the inclusion of situational awareness remains a crucial advancement to fully realize the potential of behavior-based leadership models in complex, dynamic environments (Benmira & Agboolla, 2021).

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

This subsection provides a review and analysis of empirical literature on the topic. The review is broken down into the specific objectives of the study. Peer-reviewed

materials on transformational leadership styles, laissez-faire leadership styles and transactional leadership styles are analyzed to identify knowledge gaps and how the proposed study seeks to fill those gaps.

2.3.1 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is characterized by a focus on exchange and contingent reinforcement (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Transactional leaders motivate followers by setting clear goals, providing rewards for meeting those goals, and using corrective action when deviations occur (Baltazar & Franco, 2023; Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Contingent Reward: Providing recognition and rewards when followers meet expectations (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Management-by-exception monitoring performance and taking corrective action when mistakes occur (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Management-by-Exception: Intervening only when problems become serious (Keskes, 2014). According to Musaigwa (2023) a study done in South Africa among fintech departmental managers, this leadership style gives power to the leader to evaluate, mentor and train staff to improve their performance in any situation and also reward effectiveness when the required outputs and outcomes are achieved. Studies to evaluate transactional leadership style on performance have shown negative results. This leadership offers rewards and penalties to employees and therefore does not offer much in terms of motivation and inspiration for employees to go beyond the basics. It also has a negative impact on performance and satisfaction, especially in some organizations since leaders passively await problems before directing employees to take any action. Dirik et al. (2018) a study done in Turkey among nurses in university hospital found that transactional leaders make use of reward and coercive power which is in turn linked with ineffective leadership. Bousbia, Ognjen, & Tomislav (2015) studied the “effect of Transactional Leadership on Employees Performance” among employees in Algerian banking sector using data collected across different levels of employees and age groups. The result shows that managers adopt any leadership style to enable them successfully to integrate and maximize available resources within the internal and external environment for attainment of organizational goals. In this case, managers prefer transactional style as compared to transformational leadership style to influence employees toward meeting organizational goals through rewards and punishments.

Karam and Kitana (2020) study in the public sector in the United Arab Emirates organizations found that organizations prefer different blends of leadership styles to ensure there is balance between achieving organization objectives and the welfare of their staffs. Ojelade, Ajayi, Sikiru, & Ajayi, (2020) study on effect of leadership styles on organizational performance in Nigeria among managers. The study investigated leader member relations, task structure and position power. The findings of the study revealed that leadership styles negatively effects organization performance, moreso transactional leadership which positively affected organization performance. The study, however, recommended that organizations should not just use one leadership style but also adopt a blend of styles depending on the issue at hand and should always encourage regular feedback to understand when to change the styles.

2.3.2 Laissez-faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership represents an absence of leadership, characterized by the avoidance of decision-making and a general lack of involvement (2023; Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). The leader avoids using their authority, does not make decisions, and pushes responsibility onto others (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Key behaviors associated with laissez-faire leadership include avoiding taking action (Keskes, 2014), ignoring leadership responsibilities (Keskes, 2014) and hesitating in making decisions (Keskes, 2014). This style is generally considered the least effective (Bass & Riggio, 2006, 2023). Jony et al. (2019) study on laissez-faire Leadership style on operational excellence in the service industry found that the use of such leadership styles does not have any significant effect on organization performance. The use of this leadership style was therefore found to be suitable when workers have a good understanding of their roles, when trust exists between managers and junior staff, and every person is able to own mistakes. A similar study by Ukaidi (2016) also found that laissez faire style has less effect on organization performance compared to democratic leadership styles. Akparep et al. (2019) argued that this style of leadership has not been functional in some sectors such as financial sectors where both leaders and sub-ordinates are required to contribute toward decision-making process. The style is also associated with unproductivity and inefficiency since it restrains leaders from using their power or taking initiative but rather pushing such decision making to the team. Suong, Thanh and Dao (2019) study in Vietnam on the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on

organizational performance in the service sector found that it has no significant effect on job satisfaction. Priyashantha & Win (2016) study in Sri Lanka while investigating the effect of leadership styles in the service sector found that this leadership style puts emphasis on building a cordial relationship between employers and employees such that ranks are not necessary in decision making hence leaders may never give any decision to team members irrespective of their expertise. This often results in unclear roles and sometimes staffs lack motivation making laissez-faire leadership style the weakest. According to Edelman et al., (2017) in this style employees and followers enjoy the autonomy of handling projects on their own, and even in decision-making. This means that the rigidity of a working environment exhibited by authoritarian type of leadership is eliminated when it comes to the Laissez-faire approach. Employees are allowed to do what they want as long as they get the job done right. Leaders stay out of the way and allow employees to work together and form a strong team. Subordinates are thus left by leaders to complete responsibilities in a manner of their own choosing devoid of set procedures or strict policies. The interesting aspect is that Laissez-faire gives room for positive criticism and allows employees to manage challenges and solve problems, thus contributing to operational flexibility. Other employees also get to know when to step in and contribute towards solving a problem. Iqbal et al (2021) investigated the impact of laissez-faire leadership style on thriving at work in the service industry in Pakistan using data collected from senior and junior staffs and analyzed data inferentially. The results show that laissez-faire style is negatively associated with thriving at work nevertheless moderated conscientiousness. A high level of conscientiousness strengthens negative relationship between laissez-faire and thriving at work while a moderate and low levels of conscientiousness lowers negative effect of conscientiousness and thriving at work. In Kenya, Linge, Shikaleh and Asiimwe (2016) study on the relationship between laissez-faire leadership styles on SME performance found it has strong positive influence on growth of SMEs.

In the airline industry, the application of Laissez-faire in streamlining operational excellence is inappropriate based on the sensitivity of the industry when it comes to assuring passenger safety and execution of strategies and their flow in achieving organizational goals (Bastola, 2020). The aspect of leaders secluding themselves and alienation from responsibility means that instead of solving problems, Laissez-faire

may end up creating more problems than solutions (Edelman et al., 2017). The greatest risk as affirmed by Desgourdes et al. (2024) is that Laissez-faire results in a leadership system that lacks accountability and set goals end up being unmet. The fact that a leader may often withdraw himself or participation from the group, sharing knowledge and monitoring performance becomes a problem. Leaders deny followers a chance to coach them and in the process errors that keep on affecting strategy execution. Missed deadlines, ambiguous objectives, and poor time management that end up affecting performance and overall operational excellence. The Laissez-faire leadership thus fails to form compatibility with operational excellence and only showcases partial applications that selectively help few departments.

2.3.3 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors such as Idealized Influence, serving as a role model and inspiring trust and confidence (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Inspirational Motivation, communicating a clear vision and inspiring enthusiasm (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Intellectual Stimulation, encouraging followers to challenge assumptions and think creatively (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Individualized Consideration, providing support and coaching to individual followers (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Transformational leadership, a style characterized by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence, plays a pivotal role in fostering operational excellence within organizations (Bastola, 2020). Assaf, Al-Qudah and Bashayreh (2016) study on the effect of transformation leadership style on employee commitment in Royal Jordanian Airline using 375 senior officers found that all constructs of transformative leadership styles have a considerable impact on operational performance. The operationalization of variables for the transformative leadership styles in the study included: charisma for idealized influence; inspirational motivation to employees; intellectual stimulation where leaders stimulate employees to be problem solvers and innovative; individualized consideration where leaders utilize follower's skills or execution through learning; organizational commitment that focuses on an environment of respect, trust, loyalty and justice to all employees; affective commitment where employees feel valued to remain in an organization; continuance

commitment; and normative commitment that builds a sense of obligation. Ikhsan, Adam, and Faisal (2019) studied the effect of transformational leadership style on employee's performance which mediates execution of operational tasks in an organization in Indonesia. The study involved 206 employees and data was analyzed quantitatively testing the corresponding hypothesis. The results show that increase in the intensity of transformation leadership has a significant impact on the employee performance hence effective customer services and operational excellence. The study concluded that to improve employees' performance, it is necessary that the organization instill the culture of transformational leadership style which boosts motivation, problem solving and task execution. Similarly, transformation leadership was found to improve job satisfaction, hence a sense of ownership, a sense of belonging, higher innovations in problem solution mechanism and better employee performance. Edelman et al. (2017) highlights that transformational leadership is a powerful tool for driving operational excellence in the Maastricht University Medical Center in the Netherlands. Visionary leadership plays a crucial role in achieving consistent operational excellence by fostering both internal and external cooperation among employees and suppliers of goods and services. Baker (2016) discovered that transformational leaders motivate their followers by using reason, charisma, and positive conviction, inspiring them to work harder and perform beyond expectations, even without material incentives. They create a vision, identify the need for change, and inspire commitment to the necessary transformations. By analyzing case studies of Turkish Airlines and Continental Airlines, the study highlights how visionary leadership fosters innovation, employee engagement, and operational improvements, leading to business success, Ertek (2023) also found that transformational leadership has been pivotal in promoting excellence across various airlines within the industry. Liu et al. (2018) a study done in China found that transformational leadership fosters a collaborative working environment between employees and management. When employees feel disconnected from their leaders, resistance can emerge, disrupting operations. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, encourages knowledge sharing and brainstorming with employees. This facilitates skill development and enables employees to create informed strategies and make better decisions. Eventually, innovation and creative performance is going to be achieved. In the airlines industry,

technological innovation is critical for organizations as they must meet customer needs in the most convenient ways possible. With transformational leadership, provision of a vision and individual creativity motivation fosters innovative ways of providing simple and flexible solutions to disrupted operational activities.

Omar (2016) studied leadership styles on operational efficiency of tour and travel firms in Kenya using data collected from 141 tour and travel agencies. The results revealed that the operational efficiency of travel agencies was high contributed by a mix of both transformational leadership styles and transactional leadership styles. Some of the transformational leadership styles that were found to contribute to operational excellence include involvement of followers in decision-making, freedom to autonomy for the good of the organization, sharing vision and expectations, motivation, mentorship, stimulation of followers to innovate and consciousness of task significance. The study concluded that operational efficiency influences motivation, a sense of belonging, autonomy and a culture of innovations.

2.4 Synthesis and Research Gap

While behavioral theory provides a foundational framework, modern leadership requires adaptability across contexts (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). In high-stakes industries like aviation, where safety and teamwork are critical, a more integrated approach is needed. Few studies integrate behavioral and situational approaches in these contexts. This research aims to bridge this gap by examining how leaders in the airline industry adapt their behavior to meet the demands of different situations, while also fostering a culture of safety and collaboration. Behavioral theory, emerging in the 1940s and 1950s, marked a significant shift from trait-based leadership theories (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Instead of focusing on innate qualities, behavioral theory emphasizes that effective leadership is rooted in observable behaviors that can be learned (Zakayo, 2017). This perspective suggests that anyone can become a leader by learning and practicing specific behaviors (Behavioral Theories of Leadership, 2010). The behavioral approach arose from the limitations of trait theories, which failed to consistently identify specific traits that guarantee leadership success (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Researchers began to explore what effective leaders do rather than

what they are (Zakayo, 2017). This shift was influenced by the rise of behaviorism in psychology, which emphasized the role of environmental factors in shaping behavior.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework underpinning this investigation is firmly rooted in the Behavioural Leadership Theory, a paradigm that posits that a leader's observable actions and stylistic choices are pivotal determinants of organizational outcomes (Shawe & McAndrew, 2023). This theoretical lens facilitates a granular examination of leadership, shifting the focus from innate traits to tangible behaviors that can be observed, measured, and ultimately, developed (Stanca, 2021). Drawn from this theoretical framework, the study focuses on three primary leadership styles—Transformational, Laissez-faire, and Transactional—as the independent variables, each representing a distinct approach to guiding and influencing subordinates (P. & King, 2013). Each leadership style is scrutinized through specific behavioral dimensions, enabling a nuanced understanding of how leaders interact with their teams and make decisions, which consequently influences the operational effectiveness of an organization (Papazafiroopoulos, 2013). Transformational leadership, characterized by the leader's capacity to inspire and motivate followers to transcend self-interests for the attainment of collective goals, is evaluated through behaviors such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bastola, 2020; Sangomek, 2013). Transactional leadership, which hinges on the exchange of rewards and punishments to drive performance, is assessed via contingent reward behaviors and active or passive management by exception (Tziner et al., 2011). Laissez-faire leadership, marked by its hands-off approach and delegation of responsibility to subordinates, is examined through indicators of non-intervention and avoidance of decision-making (Bastola, 2020). By examining these leadership styles, this framework seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of their impact on operational excellence within the aviation industry.

The conceptual framework for this study depicts the relationship between leadership styles i.e, transactional, laissez-faire and transformational leadership styles and operational excellence in the Kenyan airline industry. The framework posits that transformational, laissez-faire, and transactional leadership styles influence

operational excellence, which is measured by customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, customer loyalty and minimal flight cancellations.



The conceptual framework is presented in figure 2.1 below:

Independent Variables

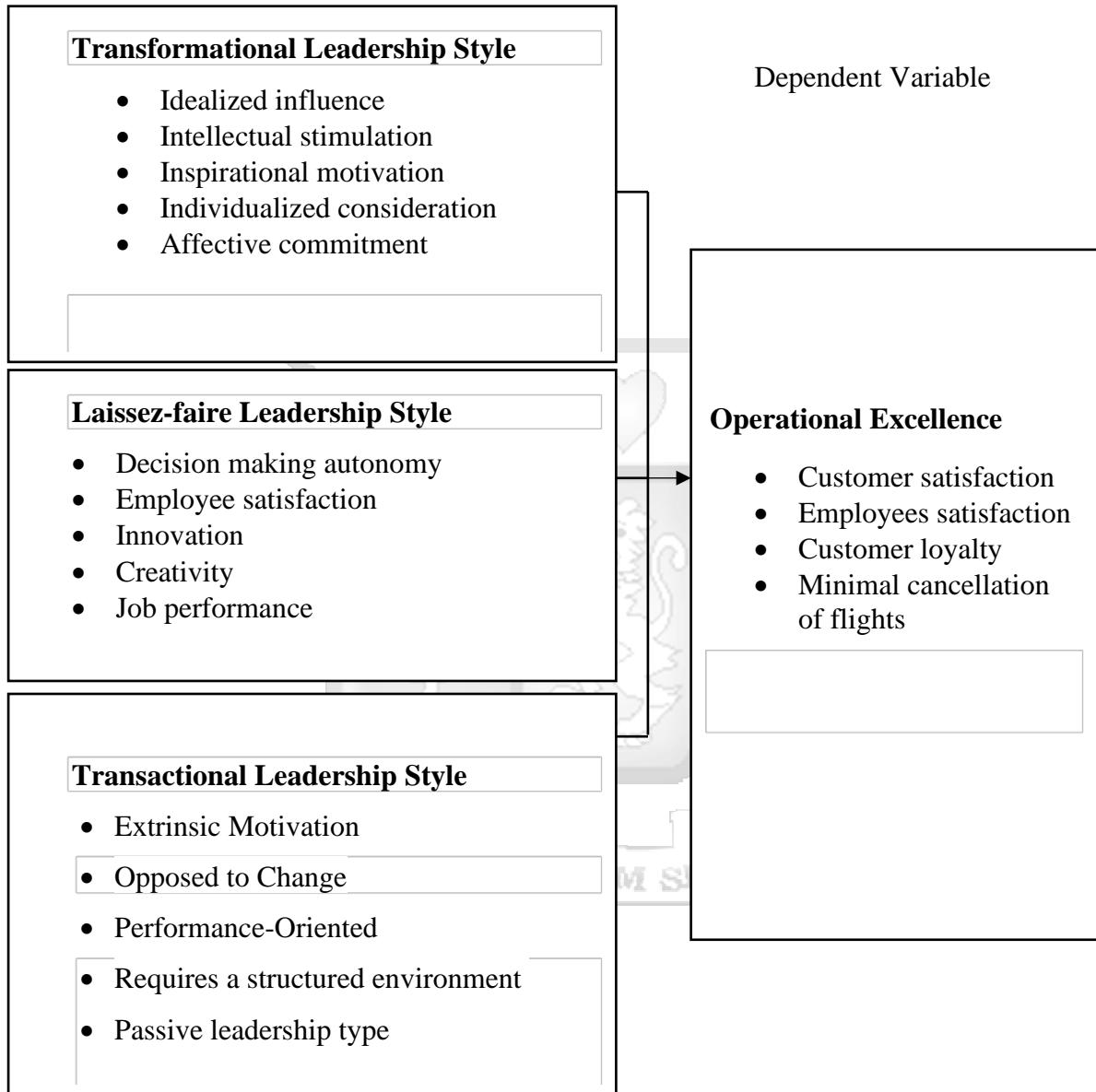


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

2.6 Operationalization of Variables

Table 2.1: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Definition of variable	Indicator	Category of Data	Source	Measurement
Transformational Leadership Styles	A leadership style in which leaders encourage, inspire and motivate employees to innovate and create change that will shape the future success of the company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idealized influence • Inspirational motivation • Innovative • Individualized consideration • Affective commitment 	Quantitative	Benmira <i>et al.</i> , (2021); Muenjohn <i>et al.</i> , (2008); Bastola, 2020; Assaf <i>et al.</i> , (2016); Ikhsan, et al (2019); Edelman <i>et al.</i> , (2017); Baker (2016); Ertek (2023); Liu <i>et al.</i> , (2018); Omar (2016).	Likert Scale/ Text/narrative
Laissez-faire Leadership Style	A leadership system where employees are trusted and relied upon in decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to make operations decisions • Management trust for employees • Problem solving skills • Autonomy at work • Leadership not involved in operations matters 	Quantitative	Muenjohn <i>et al.</i> , (2008); Bass <i>et al.</i> , (2006); Keskes (2014); Bass et al (2023); Jony <i>et al.</i> (2019); Ukaidi (2016); Akparep <i>et al.</i> , (2019); Suong, Thanh and Dao (2019) Priyashantha et al (2016) Edelman <i>et al.</i> , (2017); Iqbal <i>et al.</i> , (2021); Linge <i>et al.</i> , (2016); Edelman <i>et al.</i> , (2017); Desgourdes <i>et al.</i> , (2024)	Likert Scale/ Text/narrative
Transactional Leadership Style	A is a leadership style where leaders rely on rewards and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extrinsic Motivation • Opposed to Change • Performance-Oriented 	Quantitative	Muenjohn <i>et al.</i> , (2008); Baltazar <i>et al.</i> , (2023);	Likert Scale/ Text/narrative

Variable	Definition of variable	Indicator	Category of Data	Source	Measurement
	punishments to achieve optimal job performance from their subordinates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a structured environment • Passive leadership type 		Muenjohn <i>et al.</i> , (2008); Bass <i>et al.</i> , (2006); Musaigwa (2023); Dirik <i>et al.</i> , (2018); Bousbia <i>et al.</i> , (2015); Karam <i>et al.</i> , (2020); Ojelade <i>et al.</i> , (2020).	
Operational Excellence	This is the smooth running of the organization with employees and customers satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction • Employees satisfaction • Customer loyalty • Minimal cancellation of flights 	Quantitative	Omar (2016); Edelman <i>et al.</i> , (2017); Bastola (2020); Assaf <i>et al.</i> , (2016); Desgourdes <i>et al.</i> , (2024); Bass <i>et al.</i> , (2006, 2023); Jony <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Likert Scale/ Text/narrative

Table 1 Operationalization of Variables



2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the theoretical foundations of leadership, focusing on behavioral and contemporary leadership theories. It has synthesized key studies, models, and critiques to contextualize the research problem. The chapter has also presented the conceptual framework and operationalization of variables.



CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlined the methodological framework that guided the research in examining the influence of leadership styles on operational excellence within the Kenyan airline industry. It detailed the research design, target population and sampling strategy, data collection methods, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures. The chapter also addressed the ethical considerations that were adhered to throughout the study. The primary goal of the research was to investigate the extent to which different leadership styles, namely transformational, laissez-faire, and transactional leadership, impacted key dimensions of operational excellence within Kenyan airlines. By examining this relationship, the study aimed to provide valuable insights to inform the development of leadership practices and strategies aimed at enhancing airline performance, improving service delivery, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the Kenyan aviation sector.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the extent to which variations in leadership styles—transformational, laissez-faire, and transactional—were associated with differences in operational excellence. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design was used. As noted by Bryman (2012), this type of design involves collecting data from a sample of cases at a single point in time.

3.2.1 Population for the Study

The study population comprised frontline managers within international IATA accredited airlines with offices in Kenya. These frontline managers were individuals who directly supervise and led operational staff, playing a critical role in implementing organizational strategies and influencing day-to-day operational efficiency. For the purpose of this research, frontline managers were defined as those holding positions such as Shift Supervisors, Team Leaders, Departmental Supervisors, Station Managers, Customer Service Managers, and Operations Supervisors. Frontline managers were selected as the target population because of their direct involvement in operational activities and their

significant influence on employee performance and overall operational excellence. As Kotter (1990) noted, frontline managers play a crucial role in executing organizational strategies and driving performance at the operational level. Their perspectives on leadership styles and their impact on operational outcomes were therefore essential to understand the dynamics of operational excellence in the airline industry. It was important to acknowledge that the exact number of frontline managers within the IATA-accredited international airlines in Kenya was not known. Due to the absence of a centralized database or readily available information on the specific number of frontline managers across these organizations, the study population size was considered unknown. This limitation necessitated the use of a non-probability sampling method, as described in the following section.

3.3 Sampling Technique for the Study

The exact size of the study population was unknown, a non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, was employed to select participants. The researcher reached out directly to frontline supervisors and managers working within the 16 international IATA-accredited airlines operating in Kenya. These individuals were selected based on ease of access, availability, and willingness to participate. This approach was suitable due to the lack of a centralized database or formal contact lists of frontline managers, making random sampling impractical. By targeting participants who were readily reachable and cooperative, the researcher was able to collect data from a diverse group of frontline managers across various departments and airlines. Regarding sample size determination, preliminary information from four airlines indicated that one middle-level manager typically supervises about 10 employees. Using this estimate and assumptions about the proportion of frontline managers, the Cochran formula was applied to calculate the minimum required sample size for the survey.

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where n_0 is the sample size, Z is the confidence level of 95% which corresponds with table value of 1.96; p is the proportion of population of interest which is 10%; and q is 1-10% and e is error of margin which is 5%

$$m_{00} = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.1 * 0.90}{0.05^2} = 138$$

The sample size for the study is therefore 138 middle level managers.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The primary method of data collection was an online survey conducted using Microsoft Forms. Online surveys were chosen due to their cost-effectiveness, efficiency in reaching a geographically dispersed sample, and ease of data entry and analysis (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

The survey consisted of two main sections:

- Section 1: Demographic Information, which collected participants' demographic data such as age, gender, level of education, job title, and years of experience in the airline industry. This information provided a descriptive overview of the sample and helped analyze any potential moderating effects on the relationship between leadership styles and operational excellence.
- Section 2: Leadership Styles and Operational Excellence, which contained questions designed to measure the study's key variables. Leadership styles were measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), developed by Bass and Avolio (2004). The MLQ-5X is a widely validated instrument that assesses transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles through Likert-scale items asking respondents how frequently their managers exhibited specific leadership behaviors. A copy of the MLQ-5X questionnaire is appended in Appendix II.

Operational excellence was measured using questions developed from a review of relevant literature and consultations with industry experts. These items assessed critical

dimensions such as on-time performance, safety, customer satisfaction, and efficiency. Like the MLQ-5X, these were measured on a Likert scale, with respondents indicating their level of agreement or frequency on a 5-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” or “Never” to “Always.” The use of Likert scales for both leadership styles and operational excellence allowed for quantitative data measurement and analysis. The data collection process followed several key steps to ensure quality and reliability.

The survey was developed using Microsoft Forms and initially pilot tested with five frontline managers from five different international IATA-accredited airlines operating in Kenya. To recruit these participants, the researcher directly contacted the airlines via phone and email, requesting volunteers among their frontline managers. These individuals were not part of the main study sample. Feedback from the pilot participants who worked as supervisors within IATA international airlines helped identify any unclear questions and technical issues, which enabled the researcher to refine the questionnaire for clarity, readability, and user-friendliness prior to broader distribution. Once revised, the finalized survey was distributed directly to frontline supervisors and managers using email and phone contacts specifically WhatsApp. Each participant received a cover letter outlining the study’s purpose, assuring confidentiality and anonymity, and providing clear instructions. Informed consent was obtained before respondents accessed the survey. The data collection period lasted four weeks to give participants adequate time to respond, with reminder messages sent midway through the period to encourage participation. All collected data was securely stored in password-protected electronic files, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. The data was used solely for the purposes of this research.

3.5 Research Quality- Validity and Reliability

To ensure the collection of high-quality data, the study considered construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted before the main study to address any issues raised by the study participants.

3.5.1 Validity

Instrument validity refers to whether data obtained represent the phenomena under study (Taherdoost, 2016). To ensure validity the study used pre-existing validated questionnaire

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X). As such, variables were properly operationalized and measured for each concept which was properly measured and validated from both theoretical and empirical literature. To ensure internal validity, also called “logical validity,” a thorough theoretical and empirical literature was carried out to ensure each variable can be measured by at least three constructs and that the data was collected from the same group of study participants, and the same questions were applied to each study participant (Snyder et al., 2016). The study also computed Cronbach’s alpha to estimate correlations between variables and ensure only variables with high correlations and Cronbach’s alpha of 0.6 were included in the final analysis. To ensure external validity, the researcher studied multiple airlines to understand how various leadership styles have influenced operational excellence therefore providing reasonable basis for analytical generalization. The study also ensured that representatives were well informed and respondents were selected for the study and that each airline industry was included in the study.

3.5.2 Reliability

The survey was designed using Microsoft Forms and pilot tested remotely with five frontline managers, each representing a different international IATA-accredited airline operating in Kenya. These pilot participants were recruited by directly contacting the airlines through email and phone calls, requesting volunteers to review and complete the survey prior to the main study. Feedback from this diverse pilot group was instrumental in identifying unclear or confusing questions, as well as any technical issues with the Microsoft office online form. Their input was used to refine the questionnaire, enhancing clarity, readability, and overall user-friendliness. This process ensured that the final survey was easy to understand and accurately completed by the main study participants.

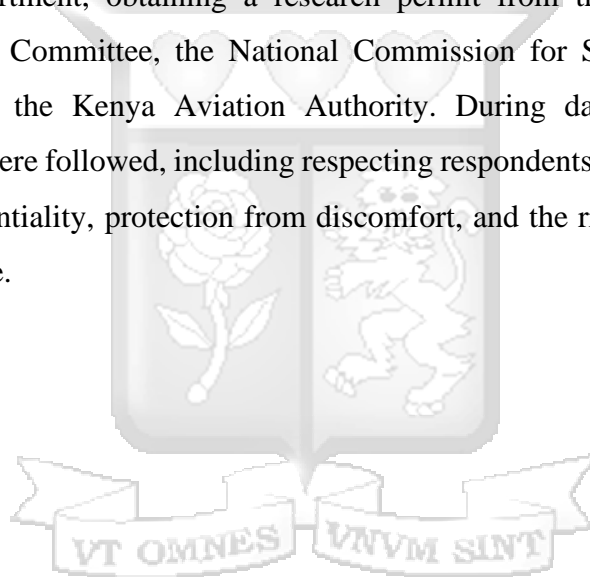
3.6 Data Analysis

The data collected in this study was analyzed using quantitative method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between leadership styles and operational excellence in the Kenyan airline industry. Data collected through the online survey tool was downloaded as csv file and imported to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 for coding and analyses. Descriptive Statistics was used to

generate frequencies, means, and percentages. Specifically, frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, such as age, gender, level of education, job title, and years of experience. This was to provide a descriptive overview of the study participants. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the scores on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) and the operational excellence measured. This provided a summary of the central tendency and variability of the data for these variables.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

The researcher adhered to all research protocols established by the University's research and ethics department, obtaining a research permit from the Strathmore University Research Ethics Committee, the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation, and the Kenya Aviation Authority. During data collection, all ethical considerations were followed, including respecting respondents' rights such as freedom of consent, confidentiality, protection from discomfort, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.



CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the evaluation of leadership styles and their effects on operational excellence within Kenyan airlines through data interpretation. The study used SPSS to analyze leadership approaches and operational performance indicators through descriptive and inferential statistical methods to determine their relationships among efficiency and customer satisfaction as well as employee engagement, and flight reliability. The report follows a sequence of demographic observations about respondents before performing measurement scale, reliability assessments, and finally measuring leadership style operational excellence correlations. The study interprets its outcomes by referring to existing theoretical approaches together with relevant scholarly publications. This research employed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) according to previous chapters to determine leadership styles and explain their impact on operational success elements. International IATA airline staff from the 16 airlines in diverse departments in Kenya formed the basis for collecting information about supervisory and managerial leadership practices.

This chapter unifies the analyzed data with theoretical findings to establish business-oriented recommendations. This work ends by presenting both future research directions as well as practical and policy implications to fully address the study objectives and respond to the research questions.

4.1 Presentation of Findings

The analysis section presents vital information extracted from surveys administered to the 16 international IATA airline supervisors and managers operating in Kenya. The research utilized structured questionnaires of the MLQ-5X to evaluate operational excellence determined by transformational and transactional leadership characteristics and laissez-faire leadership practices. The results are divided into different sections. This section showcases the demographic information of survey participants to establish an understanding of who participated in the study. Subsequently, Cronbach's Alpha becomes the chosen instrument for analyzing the internal consistency of leadership style scales.

The results from correlation analysis demonstrate both the intensity and patterns of relationships between leadership styles and operational excellence. Operational excellence receives analysis regarding each of the identified leadership styles to fulfill the research goals. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods through SPSS software analysis provided the necessary validity to evaluate leadership behavioral relationships with operational performance indicators in airline operations.

4.1.1 Description of the Full Survey Data

The survey obtained complete structured responses through questionnaires from 90 front-line staff members who work as managers and supervisors in various departments of international airlines based in Kenya. The interviewees were chosen specifically because they play crucial leadership roles that decide operational matters throughout airline operations. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) used the coded raw data to perform data cleaning, as well as analysis and data visualization tasks. The demographic features of the respondents were presented using descriptive statistics to provide information about the basic characteristics of the study sample. The descriptive data serves to establish the operational background within which leadership styles function to affect organizational performance. The study employed two descriptive visualization approaches through tables of frequencies and distribution percentages to show patterns of participants based on gender and age and educational qualifications, and their roles. The descriptive data supports the validity and enhances the generalizability of future inferential analyses that study the effects of leadership styles on operational excellence.

4.1.1.1 Percentage Responses by Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	39	43.3	43.3
Male	51	56.7	56.7
Total	90	100.0	100.0

Table 2 Gender distribution

The study participants consisted of 56.7% male and 43.3% female respondents from a total of 90 participants. The gender distribution shows that male participants outnumber females, although the samples remain balanced between genders. The established gender ratios between male and female managers in Kenyan international airlines align with this data distribution. The findings gain greater credibility since they originate from multiple professional viewpoints that achieve an optimal balance between genders. The fact that majority of male leaders in the study's participant demographics does not diminish the validity of research findings because female respondents made up a noteworthy portion of the sample base.

4.1.1.2 Area of Expertise

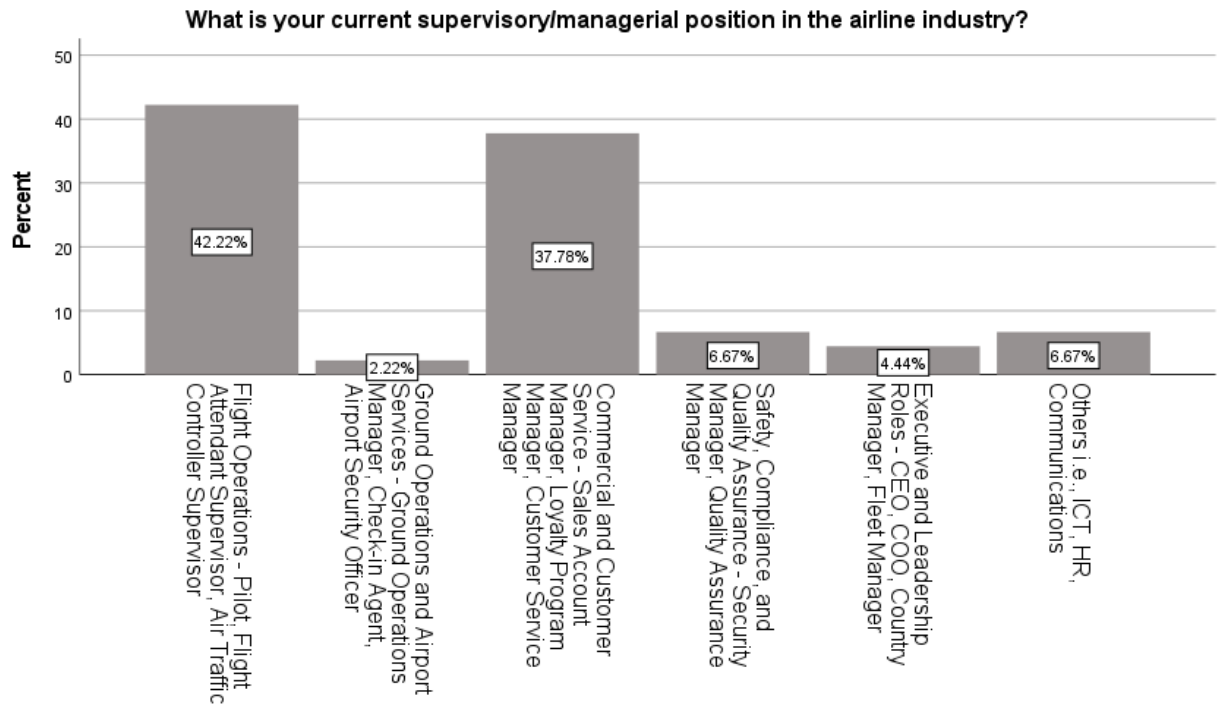


Figure 1 Area of Expertise

The research divided participants according to their current positions as supervisors or managers in different departments of IATA Kenya-based international airlines. Flight Operations drew the biggest number of participants at 42.2% among the study group, which included Pilots, Flight Attendant Supervisors, and Air Traffic Controller Supervisors. Frontline aviation personnel maintain a crucial position because they supervise essential operational functions that protect safety and efficiency. The commercial and customer service team represented the second-largest group with 37.8% of professionals, including Sales Account Managers and Loyalty Program Managers, and Customer Service Managers. Customer satisfaction, together with service quality, acts as vital operational excellence indicators within the aviation industry because these roles ensure their delivery. Safety, Compliance, Quality Assurance personnel, ICT, HR, and Communication users shared equal samples (6.7%) that contributed essential observations about regulatory activities and internal coordination operations. Executive Leaders made up 4.4% of the survey participants, while most respondents fell under front-line executive

positions. Finally, Ground Operations and Airport Services roles accounted for 2.2% of respondents. A wide range of managerial roles indicates how the study thoroughly explores the whole airline operation to show how leadership styles display themselves and affect performance throughout various operational domains.

4.1.1.3 Age Distribution

Participants in this study mostly fell within the 26 to 35 years age bracket, while 35.6% of participants belonged to the 36 to 45 years age group. Most participants (80 percent) belonged to entry-level and middle-career phases, which typically expose them to hands-on management duties. The demographic group aged 46 to 55 years represented 13.3% of the sample population, and respondents aged over 55 years made up only 2.2% of the total participants. Among the total sample participants, 4.4% belonged to the 18-to-25-year-old category, which demonstrates that entry-level professionals have minimal leadership responsibilities. The age profile shows that mature airline professionals who had accumulated considerable experience in airline operations formed the main part of the study participants. These participants have a strong foundation for examining leadership influences on operational performance in the aviation industry, which stands as a safety-sensitive dynamic environment.

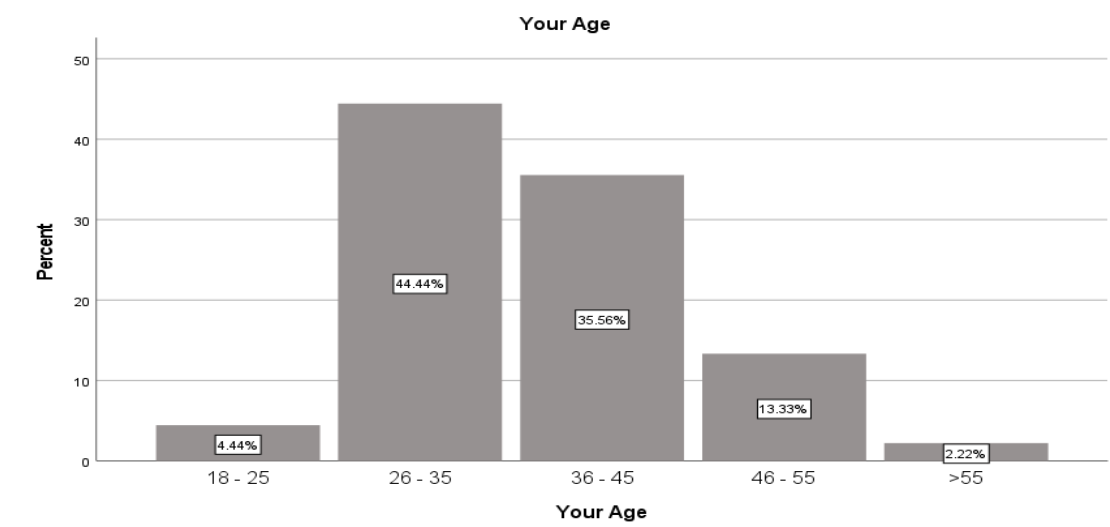


Figure 2 Age Distribution

4.1.1.4 Level of Education

Frontline managers in the airline industry mostly possess a bachelor's degree, according to 56.7% of the participants. The workforce demonstrated robust postgraduate capabilities, with 13.3% of managers holding master's degrees in addition to the bachelor's degree holders at 56.7%. Research findings indicated that Diploma certification was held by 17.8% of the respondents, while Secondary-level education was held by 12.2% of the participants. The minority figures supply useful operational findings because they come from experienced workers who followed vocational or technical career paths. The education profile of international airlines employees in Kenya demonstrates a strong, proficient management team. The respondents exhibit fundamental analytical abilities and leadership qualities, which establish strong principles to operate aviation spaces with operational excellence.

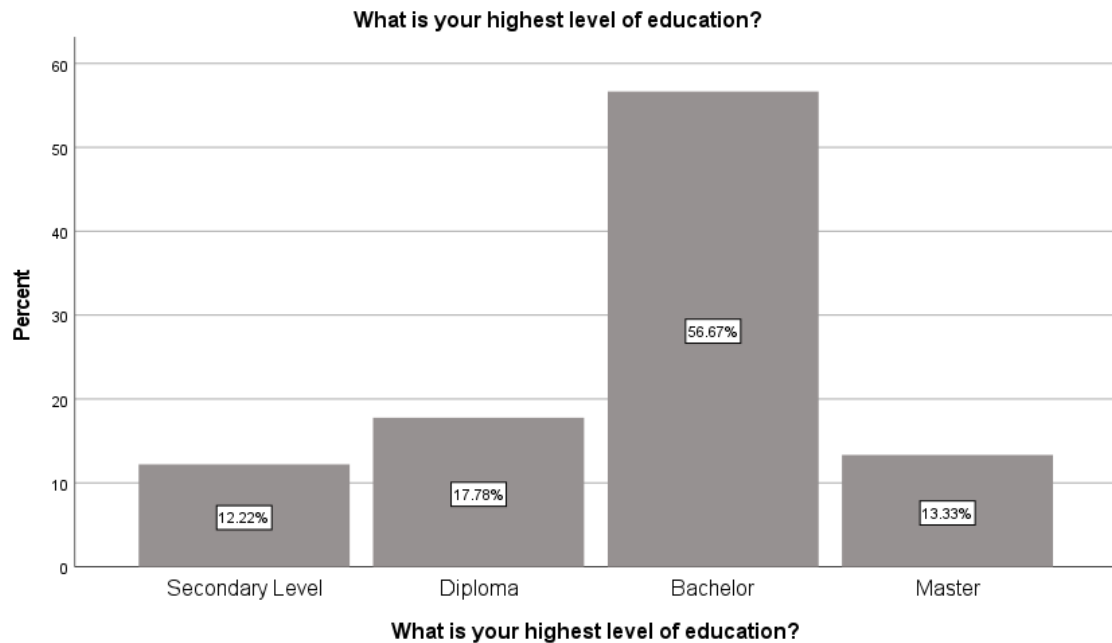


Figure 3 Education level

4.1.2 Reliability Analysis

To check internal consistency of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha was used to test all 4 groups.

4.1.2.1 Transformational Leadership Scale

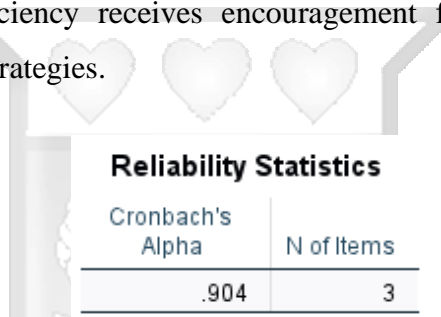
These are positively framed items where the leader:

Inspires, motivates, and encourages innovation, creates vision, demonstrates idealized influence, and fosters commitment. From the questionnaire, the questions that were considered in this reliability study are:

Q8: My leader clearly defines a future direction for the airline.

Q9: The leadership of my leader motivates personnel to provide outstanding customer service beyond their defined expectations.

Q10: The airline's efficiency receives encouragement from my leader to promote innovative operational strategies.



Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.904	3

Figure 4 Transformational Leadership Scale - Cronbach's Alpha

The researcher employed Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the Transformational Leadership scale. This construct was measured by three items, which produced a high reliability rate of 0.904. The research of George and Mallery (2003) states that "excellent" reliability occurs when alpha values surpass 0.9, which supports that evaluation items monitor the same core element. These items demonstrate excellent consistency between them, thus validating their combined usage as the transformational leadership measurement scale, which enhances analysis validity for operational excellence research.

4.1.2.2 Laissez-Faire Leadership Scale

The items capture leaders who lack leadership skills while displaying uncertainty and evading their duties. The questions included in the following questionnaire section were examined.

Q11: My leader stays inactive in dealing with operational challenges.

Q12: The leader avoids taking essential decisions during critical situations, which include flight delay management, together with safety emergency responses.

Q13: My leader avoids speaking to the team after operational disruptions occur.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.610	3

Figure 5 Laissez-Faire Leadership Scale - Cronbach's Alpha

The Cronbach's Alpha value for the three-question Laissez-Faire Leadership scale reached 0.610 in the reliability evaluation. The obtained Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.610 demonstrates an acceptable strength for behavioral social science exploratory research as per Hair et al. (2014). The items demonstrate sufficient relation to measure laissez-faire leadership despite having a reliability score that is slightly lower than other leadership scales. The measured reliability of the scale seems slightly reduced, probably because laissez-faire leadership shows passive and inconsistent characteristics, while employees in airline operations might understand it differently from each other.

4.1.1.3 Transactional Leadership Scale

Under this style, the leader focuses on tracking performance and delivers explicit requirements and offers performance-based awards.

The following questions were considered;

Q14: The supervisor checks my work performance through regular assessment sessions.

Q15: The operational targets of my leader are described through precise guidelines and defined expectations.

Q16: My leader rewards employees for meeting performance goals.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.691	3

Figure 6 Transactional Leadership Scale - Cronbach's Alpha

A Cronbach's Alpha of 0.691 resulted from evaluating the three Transactional Leadership items (Q14-Q16). This score passes the threshold of 0.70 for exploratory studies according to Nunnally (1978) and Hair et al. (2014), even though it is slightly below the conventional standard. The results demonstrate a decent amount of internal consistency concerning this leadership dimension within aviation operations in Kenya, despite using items to assess its performance monitoring aspects and clear expectations and rewards.

4.2 Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

A study of survey results focusing on 90 frontline managers from international airlines based in Kenya forms the basis of this section. The study data was analyzed with SPSS software by performing descriptive and inferential statistical operations to determine any relationship between leadership styles and operational success. Before analysis, descriptive statistics provided demographic findings about respondents, as well as the leadership, along with operational patterns of the studied population. The research used Cronbach's Alpha to evaluate the consistency between items which assessed transformational as well as transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. Pearson correlation enabled the researchers to conduct inferential analysis that revealed both the significance and the degree of relationship between leadership techniques and operational excellence levels. The analysis interprets the study's data points to achieve its particular objectives by using findings that match existing literature alongside the theoretical foundations of the research. The organized evaluation establishes knowledge regarding the magnitude that leadership conduct influences operational performance throughout Kenya's airline sector.

4.2.1 Relationships Between Variables

A Pearson correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the intensity and orientation of relationships between transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and operational excellence among frontline managers working in Kenyan international airlines. SPSS software version 25 was used in the analysis to determine linear relationships between leadership styles and operational excellence through calculations of Pearson correlation values (r). Pearson's correlation was chosen because it offers a proper method to examine the relational strength between two continuous variables. The research measured all variables with Likert-scale items and fulfilled the necessary assumptions for correlation analysis. A correlation analysis was used on 90 complete responses that established a substantial data framework after 65.2% (90 out of 138) of participants responded. The obtained response rate demonstrates acceptable statistical validity and represents the population well, which leads to better reliability of the study's findings. The evaluation of relationship strengths appears after a breakdown by research purpose in the following subsections. The analysis used $p < 0.05$ as the significance level to establish whether the detected relationships had statistical significance. The findings in the correlation tables from SPSS analysis can be found in the research objective segment, while providing an interpretation of their relationships. The conducted analyses provide details about how each leadership approach affects operational performance measures, including efficiency and safety and customer satisfaction, and innovation levels for Kenyan airlines.

		Trans_Leadership	Laissez_Leadership	Transact_Leadership	Oper_Excellence
Trans_Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.703**	.714**	.758
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	.009
	N	90	90	90	90
Laissez_Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.703**	1	.698**	.253
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	.228
	N	90	90	90	90
Transact_Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.714**	-.398**	1	.844
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		.003
	N	90	90	90	90
Oper_Excellence	Pearson Correlation	.758	.253	.844	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.228	.003	
	N	90	90	90	90

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 7 : Correlation analysis

4.2.1.1 Transformational Leadership and Operational Excellence

Research evaluated the correlation between international airlines in Kenya and transformational leadership affecting operational excellence. The study applied Pearson correlation analysis because it suits the determination of linear connections between two continuous variables. Three questionnaire items measured the transformational leadership constructs through elements that evaluated vision development, together with employee motivation and innovation stimulation. The evaluation of operational excellence involved analyzing four main quality measures, starting from customer satisfaction, through employee satisfaction, towards customer loyalty, with additional consideration of minimal flight cancellations. The answers were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, while the reliability measurement of the transformational leadership scale showed excellent results (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.904). Operational excellence showed a strong, statistically significant positive relationship with transformational leadership, as the Pearson correlation coefficient amounted to $r = 0.758$ at $p\text{-value} = 0.009$. The research shows that airlines operating with frontline managers who exhibit strong transformational leadership skills will obtain superior operational performance. The obtained result harmonizes with the findings of Bass and Avolio (1994), who showed that transformational leadership

serves as a primary factor boosting innovation and employee commitment, and organizational performance. The strong relationship shows that operational excellence in the Kenyan airline industry depends heavily on leadership behavior traits such as vision, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation, coupled with individual support. The results show that transformational leadership succeeds at both staff motivation and enhancement of operational metrics relating to efficiency and teamwork, and customer service delivery, which are essential elements in aviation's safety-sensitive and high-performance sector.

4.2.1.2 Laissez-Faire Leadership and Operational Excellence

The analysis focused on establishing whether international Kenyan airlines maintain operational excellence when their leadership follows laissez-faire principles. Leadership under a laissez-faire approach demonstrates both unwillingness to control decision-making and minimal supervisory intervention, together with nonparticipation in active executive responsibilities. The three survey items evaluated leader indecisiveness, along with their absenteeism during operational problems and their reluctance to conduct crucial operations. Operational excellence showed a weak yet statistically insignificant relationship to laissez-faire leadership according to the calculated $r = 0.253$, while $p = 0.228$. Statistical analysis reveals that this correlation between laissez-faire leadership and operational excellence is weak and the relationship is non-significant. Laissez-faire leadership demonstrates no impact on the operational outcomes evaluated in this research since their relationship remains weak according to correlation analysis. The absence of statistical significance demonstrates that laissez-faire leadership makes no meaningful contribution to operational performance across the chosen airline organizations. Research by Skogstad et al (2007) and Iqbal and other colleagues (2021) supports the finding that laissez-faire leadership shows ineffectiveness in aviation due to its structured, demanding environment. This type of leadership that keeps a distance from active decision-making creates confusion and weakens responsibility for results in operational environments that need direct oversight. Results confirm that laissez-faire leadership provides poor leadership performance for frontline air industry management, which requires instant problem resolution, together with transparent leadership and timely information sharing for operational success.

4.2.1.3 Transactional Leadership and Operational Excellence

This study explored how transactional leadership influences operational excellence among international airlines operating in Kenya. Transactional leadership focuses on setting clear expectations, monitoring performance, and using rewards or corrective measures to manage staff. The research used three targeted questions to assess this leadership style, particularly in relation to setting goals, monitoring progress, and applying reward systems. Results showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.644$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that transactional leadership plays a key role in enhancing operational performance. This is especially relevant in aviation, where consistency, safety, and service standards are critical. While the findings highlight the value of transactional leadership, the study also notes that relying solely on this style may limit innovation. Greater impact may be achieved when combined with transformational leadership, which encourages employee motivation and long-term growth.

4.3 Relating Results to Existing Literature

The results of this study reveal meaningful insights into the relationship between leadership styles and operational excellence in the Kenyan airline industry. The research findings confirm previous theoretical and empirical studies in some respects, while providing new expansions to existing knowledge on this subject.

4.3.1 Transformational Leadership

Operational excellence displayed a firm, significant positive link ($r = 0.758$, $p = 0.009$) with transformational leadership according to the study findings. Literature extensively demonstrates that transformational leadership stands as a key driver behind innovative achievements and employee motivation levels, which produce high-performance results in aviation and similar sectors that require extensive customer service interaction. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership enables leaders to develop both intellectual and emotional connections with their followers, thus creating dedicated followers who champion innovation. Explanation regarding how transformational leadership raises operational efficiency together with employee collaboration in highly dangerous industries emerges from Edelman et al. (2017) and Liu

et al. (2018). Omar (2016) discovered that leadership that transforms employees proved vital for operational efficiency and tour and travel firms in Kenyan markets.

4.3.2 Laissez-Faire Leadership

Research data indicates a non-significant relationship with a weak correlation value (despite $r = 0.253$ and $p = 0.228$) between laissez-faire leadership and operational excellence. Laissez-faire leadership stands as the least effective model based on existing research within structured and safety-sensitive areas (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008; Skogstad et al., 2007). The research by Iqbal et al. (2021) demonstrates that laissez-faire leadership usually leads to diminished accountability alongside delayed decisions and irregular performance results. The leadership style can produce operational risks in aviation because this sector needs precise decision-making along with quick responses and seamless coordination. A similar conclusion emerges from Desgourdes et al. (2024) as researchers demonstrated it is not recommended to use laissez-faire leadership in businesses requiring ongoing supervision and strategic commands.

4.3.3 Transactional Leadership

The research established a moderate, statistically positive relationship between transactional leadership and operational excellence with $r = 0.644$ and $p = 0.003$. Bass (1997) established that transactional leadership works best in controlled environments that require high performance standards as well as strict rules and efficient processes. Operational performance improves through transactional leadership when goals include concrete definitions and performance-based awards, according to Bousbia et al. (2015). Within Kenya's aviation sector, transactional leadership helps maintain operational structures through the implementation of increased compliance and monitoring systems combined with assessment of organizational objectives. Research indicates that the effectiveness of this leadership approach might be optimized when combined with transformational leadership systems, according to Omar (2016), about travel and aviation-related businesses. These research results validate behavioral leadership principles, which specify that transformational and transactional leadership mechanisms produce optimal organizational performance results. A leader must implement transformational methods to foster innovation and enhance engagement because these factors enable operational

superiority maintenance beyond basic transactional leadership control measures that support efficiency. Results revealed that laissez-faire leadership proved ineffective in this setting, similar to what previous academic experts have established.



CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the main findings of the study, presents conclusions drawn from the data, and outlines practical and research-based recommendations. The research set out to explore how different leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire—shape operational excellence within IATA-accredited international airlines in Kenya. In particular, it looked at how leadership influences key outcomes such as customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, and the reduction of flight cancellations. By examining these areas, the study offers valuable insights into what effective leadership looks like in the airline industry, especially in a sector where safety and regulatory compliance are critical. Grounded in behavioral leadership theory and supported by empirical evidence, this chapter highlights key lessons, discusses their relevance for airline leadership, and suggests concrete actions that can help improve overall organizational performance.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study uncovered several important insights into how leadership styles influence operational excellence within international airlines in Kenya. First, transformational leadership stood out as the most effective style, showing a strong and consistent link to positive outcomes across all four areas—customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, and reduced flight cancellations. Leaders who inspired their teams, encouraged innovation, and communicated a clear vision played a key role in strengthening overall performance. Transactional leadership also had a positive influence, especially in areas where structure, performance monitoring, and clear expectations were needed. However, its effect wasn't as significant as that of transformational leadership. On the other hand, laissez-faire leadership was found to have a negative effect. The lack of guidance, delayed decision-making, and disengaged leadership often led to operational inefficiencies, which can be particularly harmful in the highly regulated and safety-driven

aviation industry. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of leadership that is hands-on, forward-thinking, and responsive to both staff and operational needs.

5.3 Conclusion

This study confirms that leadership style plays a vital role in driving operational excellence within international airlines operating in Kenya. Of the three styles explored, transformational leadership proved to be the most impactful. Its focus on inspiring teams, encouraging innovation, and showing individual support aligns well with the demanding and fast-paced nature of the aviation industry. Transactional leadership also contributed positively, especially in maintaining structure, setting clear expectations, and ensuring accountability. However, its strengths are best realized when paired with the more visionary and motivational elements of transformational leadership. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership was linked to poor performance outcomes. Its passive and hands-off approach falls short in an environment that requires timely decision-making, active engagement, and strong leadership presence. In summary, the findings highlight the need for airline leaders to embrace adaptable and forward-thinking leadership styles—ones that not only manage day-to-day operations but also foster long-term growth, staff engagement, and excellent service delivery.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights gained, several limitations were identified:

- i. Limited Sample Size and Scope

The study achieved a 65.2% response rate, with 90 responses from a targeted 138 participants. However, the sample was limited to international airlines operating out of Nairobi, excluding domestic carriers and regional operations. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the broader Kenyan or East African aviation landscape.

- ii. Use of Self-Reported Data

Data was collected via self-administered Likert-scale questionnaires, introducing potential biases such as social desirability and subjective variability in responses. These limitations

may have influenced the accuracy of perceived leadership effectiveness and operational performance metrics.

iii. Cross-Sectional Research Design

The cross-sectional nature of the study precluded the establishment of causal relationships between leadership styles and operational outcomes. A longitudinal approach would better capture the temporal dynamics and sustained effects of leadership practices.

iv. Exclusivity of Quantitative Methods

The reliance on quantitative data limited the exploration of contextual and experiential factors that shape leadership perceptions and practices. A mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative insights would have provided a more holistic understanding.

5.5 Recommendations

Drawing from these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered for airline managers and human resource departments

i. Prioritize Transformational Leadership Development

Airlines should invest in structured leadership development programs focusing on transformational competencies. These programs should equip leaders with skills in vision-setting, motivational communication, and fostering innovation through individualized mentorship.

ii. Integrate Transformational and Transactional Approaches

Organizations should adopt a blended leadership model that leverages the motivational strength of transformational leadership with the structured oversight of transactional leadership. Training curricula should guide leaders on how to balance these approaches effectively for operational alignment.

iii. Minimize Laissez-Faire Leadership Practices

Airlines must proactively identify and mitigate laissez-faire tendencies through regular performance appraisals and mentoring. Critical operational roles require engaged leaders equipped with decision-making tools and interpersonal communication resources.

iv. Promote Continuous Leadership Evaluation

Tools like the MLQ-5X (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) should be institutionalized within HR practices for ongoing leadership assessment. These evaluations will inform recruitment, promotions, and the continuous development of leadership pipelines.

Drawing from these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered for policymakers and regulatory bodies

i. Integrate Leadership Assessment into Regulatory Audits

The Kenya Civil Aviation Authority (KCAA) should include leadership capability assessments in its standard audit and compliance frameworks. Leadership should be treated as a core component of safety, quality, and performance evaluations.

ii. Support National Leadership Development Initiatives

Collaborations between KCAA, IATA, AFRAA, and local aviation academies should establish formal leadership development standards tailored to the aviation sector. These initiatives will ensure a steady pipeline of competent leaders for both domestic and international carriers.

iii. Mandate Leadership Training for Certification

Leadership training in transformational and transactional styles should be a prerequisite for senior operational appointments and certification within the airline industry. Regulatory requirements should emphasize strategic and ethical leadership competencies.

Drawing from these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered for future researchers.

i. Conduct Longitudinal Studies

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track how leadership styles evolve over time and how they influence operational excellence across various stages of organizational growth and external challenges.

ii. Incorporate Qualitative Approaches

Researchers should include interviews, focus groups, and case studies to capture rich, contextual insights into leadership experiences. This approach will uncover nuanced dynamics between leadership behavior, employee motivation, and service delivery.

iii. Expand to Domestic Airlines and Other Regions

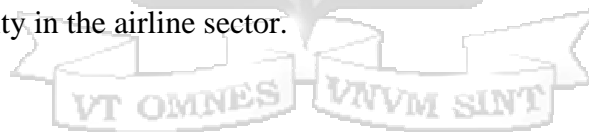
Expanding the scope to include domestic airlines and carriers from other East African countries will help assess the cultural and regional variations in leadership effectiveness and broaden the generalizability of findings.

iv. Examine Departmental Leadership Variations

Further research should investigate whether leadership styles have varying effects across departments—such as flight operations, customer service, and ground handling. This will enable the development of department-specific leadership training and support systems.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This study contributes significantly to the understanding of how leadership influences operational excellence in a complex and safety-critical industry. As Kenya continues to position itself as a regional aviation hub, adopting strategic, evidence-based leadership practices will be instrumental in strengthening the country's competitiveness, resilience, and service quality in the airline sector.



REFERENCES

- Aviation: Benefits Beyond Borders (ABBB), 2018, Air Transport Action Group (ATAG), https://aviationbenefits.org/media/166344/abbb18_full-report_web.pdf
- Akparep, J. Y., Jengre, E., & Mogre, A. A. (2019). The influence of leadership style on organizational performance at Tumakavi development association, tamale, northern region of Ghana.
- Durgut, M. (2024, September 10). Airline Companies and Their KPIs for Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty. Aviation File. <https://www.aviationfile.com/airline-companies-and-their-kpis-for-customer-satisfaction-and-loyalty/>
- Kalemba, N., Campa Planas, F., Hernández-Lara, A. B., & Carvache-Franco, M.. Service quality and economic performance in the US airline business. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 105, 102283. (Kalemba et al., 2017)
- Kovilage, M. P., Yapa, S. T. W. S., & Hewagamage, C.. Research Areas, Gaps and Future Research Directions of Operational Excellence: A Systematic Literature Review. (Kovilage et al., 2022)
- Memon, M. S., Talpur, U., & Panhwar, K. N.. Is the Quality of Service Related to Job Satisfaction? Study of Commercial Banks of Sukkur Region, Sindh, Pakistan. *Mehran University Research Journal of Engineering and Technology*, 33, 441-448.
- Mügge Yayla-Küllü, H., & Tansitpong, P.. (2013)A Critical Evaluation of U.S. Airlines' Service Quality Performance: Lower Costs vs. Satisfied Customers. *Production and Operations Management*, 22, 1473-1487.
- Ali, Mohammad & Niu, Xiongying & Rubel, Mohammad. (2024). The influence of transformational and transactional leadership on employee retention: mediating role of employee engagement. *Management Matters*. 10.1108/MANM-03-2024-0022.

- Kibbe, M.R. (2019). Leadership Theories and Styles. In: Kibbe, M., Chen, H. (eds) Leadership in Surgery. Success in Academic Surgery. Springer, Cham.
- Asimwe, J. B., Kavoo-Linge, T., & Sikalieh, D. (2016). The Relationship between Transactional Leadership Style and SMEs Growth in the Top 100 SMEs in Kenya. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 7, 74-81.
- Assaf, N., Al Qudah, M. & Bashayreh, A. (2016). Does Transformational Leadership Style effect on Employee Commitment in the Aviation Industry? *International Journal of Business and Management* 11(12), pages 163-163.
- Baker, M. (2016). Shingo model. In *WCOM (World Class Operations Management)* (pp. 217- 226). Springer, Cham.
- Bass & Bass (2013). *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*. 4th edition Free Press
- Bora, B. D. (2019). Internal Organization Dynamics and Competitive Advantages: A Study of Kenya Airways.
- Bwalya, Arthur. (2023). LEADERSHIP STYLES. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation*. 11. 181. 10.6084/m9.figshare.23932113.
- Chen, C., Ding, X., & Li, J. (2021). Transformational Leadership and Employee Job Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Employee Relations Climate and the Moderating Role of Subordinate Gender. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(1), 233. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19010233>
- Choi S, Moon C, Lee K, Su X, Hwang J, Kim I. Exploring Smart Airports' Information Service Technology for Sustainability: Integration of the Delphi and Kano Approaches. *Sustainability*. 2024; 16(20):8958. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16208958>
- Cook, G. N., & Billig, B. G. (2017). *Airline operations and management: a management textbook*.

- Desgourdes, C., J. Hasnaoui, M. Umar, J.G. Feliu. Decoding laissez-faire leadership: An in-depth study on its influence over employee autonomy and well-being at work. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 20 (2) (2024), pp. 1047-1065
- Dirik, D., & Eryilmaz, İ. (2018). Leader Power Bases and Organizational Outcomes: The Role of Perceived Organizational Politics. *Journal of East European Management Studies*, 23(4), 532–558. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26617439>
- Edelman, E. R., Hamaekers, A. E., Buhre, W. F., & Van Merode, G. G. (2017). The use of operational excellence principles in a university hospital. *Frontiers in medicine*, 4, 107.
- Ertek, Ahmet. (2023). The Role of Transformational Leadership in Airline Business Success: A Comparison of Rising Above the Clouds and From Worst to First Book 1.
- Fennell K. (2021). Conceptualisations of Leadership and Relevance to Health and Human Service Workforce Development: A Scoping Review. *Journal of multidisciplinary healthcare*, 14, 3035–3051. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S329628>
- Heale, Roberta & Twycross, Alison. (2015). Validity and reliability in quantitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*. 18. 66-67.
- Ikhsan, M., Adam, M., & Faisal. (2019). The Effect of Transformational Leadership Style and Work Motivation on Job Satisfaction and Employee's Performance of Aceh Education Agency. *The International Journal of Business Management and Technology*, 3(4), 1–8.
- Iqbal, N., Anwar, S. & Haider, N. (2015) Effect of Leadership Style on Employee Performance. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 5 (146), 1-6.
- Jony M. T. I, Alam, M. J., Amin, M. R., & Alam, M. J. (2019). The Impact of

Autocratic, Democratic and Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles on the Success of the Organization: A Study on the Different Popular Restaurants of Mymensingh, Bangladesh, Canadian

J. of Business and Information Studies, 1(6), 28-38.

<https://doi.org/10.34104/cjbis.019.028038>

Liu H, Li G. Linking Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Sharing: The Mediating Roles of Perceived Team Goal Commitment and Perceived Team Identification. *Front Psychol.* 2018 Jul 31;9:1331. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01331. PMID: 30108540; PMCID: PMC6079249.

Miller, K. (2019, October 24). *How to influence without authority in the workplace.* Business Insights – Blog. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/influence-without-authority>

Mitchell, J. S. (2015). *Operational excellence: Journey to creating sustainable value.* John Wiley & Sons.

Musaigwa, Misheck. (2023). The Role of Leadership in Managing Change. *International Review of Management and Marketing.* 13. 1-9. 10.32479/irmm.13526.

Northouse, P. G. (2018). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ojelade, O., Ajayi, J., Sikiru, L., & Ajayi, A. (2020). Cooperative Societies and Economic Development of Members In Charity Co-Operative Society, Saki, Oyo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research* 8(3), 54-60.

Omar, M. (2016). *Leadership Styles and Operational Performance of Domestic Tour and Travel Firms in Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).

Priyashantha, K.G. & Win, K. (2016). The impact of leadership styles on employee performance: analysis of the intervening effect of employee retention to the relationship of leadership styles and employee performance.

10.13140/RG.2.2.24206.64327.

Snyder H., L. Witell, A. Gustafsson, P. Fombelle, P. Kristensson. Identifying categories of service innovation: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Business Research*, 69 (2016), pp. 2401-2408, 10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.009

Sun, X., Wandelt, S., & Zhang, A. (2022). COVID-19 pandemic and air transportation: Summary of Recent Research, Policy Consideration and Future Research Directions. *Transportation research interdisciplinary perspectives*, 16, 100718.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2022.100718>

Suong, H., Thanh., & Dao, T. (2019). The impact of leadership styles on the engagement of cadres, lecturers and staff at public universities - Evidence from Vietnam. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 6(1), 273-280.
<http://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2019.vol6.no1.273>

Taherdoost, H. (2016). Sampling methods in research methodology; how to choose a sampling technique for research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)*, 5(2), 18-27.

Ukaidi, C. (2016). The influence of leadership styles on organizational performance in Nigeria.

Global Journal of Human Resource Management, 4(4), 25 – 34.

Yildiz I.G., Simsek O.F. Different pathways from transformational leadership to job satisfaction: The competing mediator roles of trust and self-efficacy. *Nonprofit Manag. Leadersh.* 2016;27:59–77. doi: 10.1002/nml.21229.

Zakayo, O. (2017). *Role of Leadership in Strategy execution in the Airline Industry in Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, JKUAT).

African Airlines Challenges Not Insurmountable: *Profit Sits Below Global Benchmark*. (2024, July 4). From IATA Airlines Article:
<https://airlines.iata.org/2024/07/04/african-airlines-challenges-not-insurmountable-profit-sits-below-global-benchmark>

Masa'deh, R. &. (2014). A Theoretical Perspective on the Relationship between Leadership Development, Knowledge Management Capability, and Firm

Performance. *Asian Journal of Social Science*.

- Mitchell, J. S. (2015). *Operational Excellence Journey to Creating Sustainable Value*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Osman, M. I., Mohammad, R., Yusof, S., & Chelliapan, S. (2021). Development of an Operational Excellence Framework for Organisational Performance Improvement in the Sudanese Aviation Industry. *Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management*, 682.
- Kovilage, M. P., Yapa, S. T. W. S., & Hewagamage, C.. (2022) Research Areas, Gaps and Future Research Directions of Operational Excellence: A Systematic Literature Review.
- Mutalib, S. A., Hashim, Z. H., Kelana, B. W. Y., & Ismail, N. A.. (2022) Factors Influencing Competitive Pricing for Airlines in Malaysia. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 89, 101924.
- Papazafirooulos, I. A. (2013) The Effects Of Leadership Style On The Overall Success Of Executives In The Airline Industry.
- Sedláček, M., & Sauer, A.. (2020) Airline Operational Excellence Survey.
- Alessa, G. S. (2021). The Dimensions of Transformational Leadership and Its Organizational Effects in Public Universities in Saudi Arabia: A Systematic Review [Review of The Dimensions of Transformational Leadership and Its Organizational Effects in Public Universities in Saudi Arabia: A Systematic Review]. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. Frontiers Media. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.682092>
- Benmira, S., & Agboola, M. (2021). Evolution of leadership theory. In *BMJ Leader* (Vol. 5, Issue 1, p. 3). BMJ. <https://doi.org/10.1136/leader-2020-000296>
- Contributors to Wikimedia projects. (2023). Full range leadership model. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Full_range_leadership_model
- Dinibutun, S. R. (2020). Leadership: A Comprehensive Review of Literature, Research and Theoretical Framework [Review of Leadership: A Comprehensive Review of Literature, Research and Theoretical Framework].

Journal of Economics and Business, 3(1).
<https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1992.03.01.177>

Keskes, I. (2014). Relationship between leadership styles and dimensions of employee organizational commitment: A critical review and discussion of future directions [Review of Relationship between leadership styles and dimensions of employee organizational commitment: A critical review and discussion of future directions]. *Intangible Capital*, 10(1). OmniaScience.
<https://doi.org/10.3926/ic.476>

Leadership styles. (2008). Retrieved March 29, 2025, from
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9781843346586500036>

Muenjohn, N., & Armstrong, Prof. A. (2008). Evaluating the structural validity of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), capturing the leadership factors of transformational- transactional leadership. In *Contemporary Management Research* (Vol. 4, Issue 1). Academy of Taiwan Information Systems Research.
<https://doi.org/10.7903/cmr.704>

Shahin, B., Rowan, S., Mazloun, T., & Kwar, N. (2024). Effective Leadership and Its Impact on the Educational Community. In *Deleted Journal* (Vol. 9, Issue 2).
<https://doi.org/10.62608/2164-1102.1150>

Lani, J. (2010, December 20). Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). *Statistics Solutions*. Retrieved from <https://www.statisticssolutions.com/multifactor-leadership-questionnaire-mlq/>

Batista-Foguet, J. M., Estève, M., & Witteloostuijn, A. van.. Measuring leadership an assessment of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Batista-Foguet et al., 2021).

Zakayo, O. *Role of leadership in strategy execution in the airline industry in Kenya* (ZAKAYO, 2017).

Avolio, B. J., Bass, B. M., & Jung, D. I.. Re-examining the components of transformational and transactional leadership using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio et al., 1999).

- Muenjohn, N., & Armstrong, A.. Evaluating the structural validity of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, capturing the leadership factors of transformational-transactional leadership (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008).
- Fleishman, E. A.. (1953) Leadership climate, human relations training, and supervisory behavior. *Personnel Psychology*, 6, 205-222.
- Judge, T. A., & Piccolo, R. F.. Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 755–768.
- Lewin, K., Lippitt, R., & White, R. K.. Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created social climates. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 10, 269-299.
- Likert, R.. (1963) *New patterns of management*. McGraw-Hill.
- Weber, M.. (1947) *The theory of social and economic organization*. Oxford University Press.
- Bass, B. M. & Avolio, B. J. (1994). Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership. Sage Publications.
- Bass, B. M. (1997). Does the transactional-transformational leadership paradigm transcend organizational and national boundaries? *American Psychologist*, 52(2), 130–139.
- Benmira, S. & Agboola, M. (2021). Leadership theories and styles: A literature review. *Journal of Management Sciences*.
- Edelman, A., et al. (2017). The Role of Transformational Leadership in Healthcare Performance. Maastricht University Medical Center.
- Liu, W., Zhu, R., & Yang, Y. (2018). Transformational leadership and employee voice behavior: A cross-level investigation in China. *Academy of Management Journal*.
- Muenjohn, N., & Armstrong, A. (2008). Evaluating the structural validity of the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ), capturing the leadership factors of transformational-transactional leadership. *Contemporary Management*

Research, 4(1), 3–14.

Omar, S. A. (2016). Leadership styles and operational efficiency in travel and tourism firms in Kenya. *International Journal of Tourism Studies*.

Skogstad, A., Einarsen, S., Torsheim, T., Aasland, M. S., & Hetland, H. (2007). The destructiveness of laissez-faire leadership behavior. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 12(1), 80–92.

Northouse, P. G. (2018). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.

Bousbia, O., Ognjen, S., & Tomislav, H. (2015). Transactional leadership and performance in the Algerian banking sector. *International Review of Management and Business Research*.

Iqbal, N., et al. (2021). Laissez-faire leadership and workplace outcomes: Moderating effects of conscientiousness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

George, M. L. (2002). *Lean Six Sigma: Combining Six Sigma quality with lean speed*. McGraw-Hill.

Snee, R. D., & Hoerl, R. W. (2007). *Leading Six Sigma: A step-by-step guide based on experience with GE and other Six Sigma companies*. FT Press.

Yukl, G. A. (2013). *Leadership in organizations* (8th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

International Air Transport Association. (2021). Outlook for air transport and the airline industry. IATA. <https://www.iata.org/en/publications/>

International Civil Aviation Organization. (2020). Effects of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on civil aviation: Economic impact analysis. ICAO.

Chen, F. Y., & Chang, Y. H. (2020). Examining airline service quality and customer satisfaction: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 88,

Goh, C. L., & Law, R. (2021). Operational excellence and flight schedule performance: A study of the airline industry. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 22(3), 245-263.

Hapsari, R., Clemes, M. D., & Dean, D. (2019). The impact of service quality and customer engagement on customer loyalty in the airline industry. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, 11(3), 302-317.

Pugh, S. D., Dietz, J., & Brooks, S. M. (2018). Employee satisfaction and service quality in the airline industry. *Journal of Service Research*, 21(1), 55-74.

FROM jenni ai

De Meyer, C.F., & Mostert, P.. The influence of passenger satisfaction on relationship formation in the South African domestic airline industry. *Acta Commercii*, 15, 1-11. (Meyer & Mostert, 2011)

Stanley, H. C.. Effect Of Relationship Marketing On Customer Satisfaction In The Airline Industry In Kenya (Stanley, 2013)

Pereira, F. C., Costa, J. M., Ramos, R. F., Sousa, B. M., & Santos, M. G.. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on airlines' passenger satisfaction. *Sustainability*, 13, 9528. (Pereira et al., 2023)

Farah, H. A., Munga, J., & Mbebe, J.. Influence of competitive strategies on performance of commercial airlines in Kenya: A survey of the airline industry in Kenya.

P., A. K., & King, B. (2013). Transactional and Transformational Leadership: A Comparative Study of the Difference between Tony Fernandes (Airasia) and Idris Jala (Malaysia Airlines) Leadership Styles from 2005-2009. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 8(24).

Sangomek, P. (2013). Leadership Nature of Commanders in Royal Thai Air Force. *Business and Management Research*, 2(3).

Shawe, R., & McAndrew, I. (2023). Theories of Leadership and Emergency Management. *Modern Economy*, 14(6), 738.

Stanca, I. (2021). Leadership: from classic theories to the 21st century's challenges. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 120, 2023.
<https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202112002023>

Tziner, A., Vasiliu, C., Tordera, N., & Kaufman, R. (2011). Organizational Perceptions, Leadership, Performance and Organizational Citizenship Among Older Employees in Work Settings: Can They Interrelate? *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1885063>

APPENDIX I: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

My name is Judy Munene, a student at Strathmore Business School taking Master of Business Administration. I am undertaking a research thesis whose title is “influence of leadership styles on operational excellence of airline industry in Kenya.” You are being contacted as an employee working with Kenya airline industry and therefore requested to complete this questionnaire to the best of your knowledge. All your information is confidential, and you are not required to reveal your identity in this study. Please also remember that there is no wrong or right answer to the questions and therefore provide the best answer you think about.

Procedures to be followed

Participation in this study will require you to answer a few questions by a way of a structured questionnaire with open ended questions. Participation in this study is voluntarily. This means that you are free to refuse to participate, to refuse to respond to any questions and you may stop at any time, without any negative repercussions. You may ask questions related to the study at any time.

Discomforts and Risks

If some of the questions make you uncomfortable, you may refuse to answer these questions if you choose or ask for clarification. I would also like to assure you that since your anonymity will be preserved the information you provide cannot be linked to you.

Benefits

If you participate in this study, you will help us to learn on how the leadership styles influence operational excellence of airlines and therefore help us make recommendations to the industry. The findings may be used to policy makers to improve operational excellence through adjustments to leadership styles.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

You are required to complete this questionnaire at your most convenient time and return the questionnaire when you are comfortable. Your name will not be recorded on the questionnaire and will not appear in any of the results reports.

Contact Information

If you have any questions, you may contact any of the following:

1. Judy Munene on 0701079994
2. The Strathmore Business School Ethical Review Committee Secretariat

Participant's statement

The above information regarding my participation in the study is clear to me. I have been given a chance to ask questions, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I understand that my records will be kept private and that I can leave the study at any time.

Signature :

Date:.....

APPENDIX II: LIST OF 16 AIRLINES

16 International Airlines with presence and operate in and Nairobi Hub –

1. Kenya Airways (KQ)
2. Ethiopian Airlines (ET)
3. RwandAir (WB)
4. South African Airways (SA)
5. EgyptAir (MS)
6. Air Mauritius (MK)
7. Air Tanzania (TC)
8. Precision Air (PW)
9. Emirates (EK)
10. Qatar Airways (QR)
11. Turkish Airlines (TK)
12. Lufthansa (LH)
13. British Airways (BA)
14. Air France-KLM (AF/KL)
15. Etihad Airways (EY)
16. Ugandan Airlines (UA)



APPENDIX III: QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?

Woman

Man

2. What is your age?

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-55

>55

3. How many years have been in the airline industry?

Less than 2 Years

3 - 6 Years

7 - 10 Years

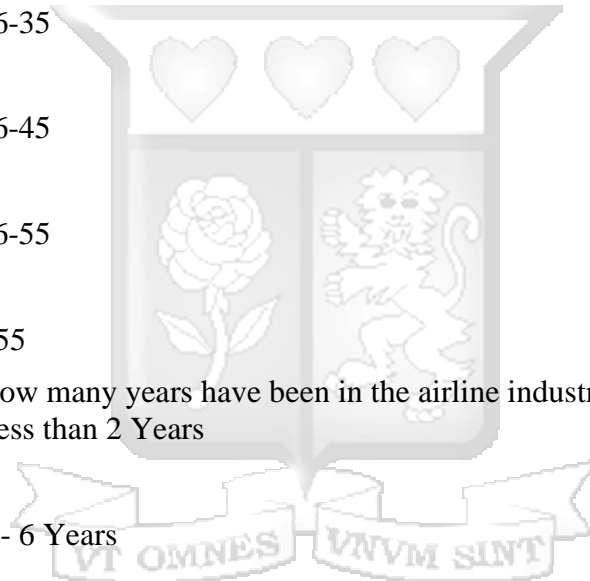
11 - 20 Years

Above 20 Years

4. What is your highest level of education?

Secondary level

Certificate



- Diploma
- Degree
- Masters
- PhD

5. What is your current supervisory/managerial position in the airline industry? *

- Flight Operations - Pilot, Flight Attendant Supervisor, Air Traffic Controller Supervisor
- Ground Operations and Airport Services - Ground Operations Manager, Check-in Agent, Airport Security Officer
- Commercial and Customer Service - Sales Account Manager, Loyalty Program Manager, Customer Service Manager,
- Safety, Compliance, and Quality Assurance - Security Manager, Quality Assurance Manager
- Executive and Leadership Roles - CEO, COO, Country Manager, Fleet Manager
- Others i.e., ICT, HR, Communications

6. Is the current airline industry your first employer since graduation?

- Yes
- No
- Other

7. If No to Question 6; why did you leave your previous employers?

- Leadership issues
- For better working conditions/better pay
- My own personal reasons
- N/A

SECTION B: LEADERSHIP STYLES

This section will utilize the MLQ5X tool which contains statements that assess the leadership behaviors that are common in the airline industry.

8. Rate the following statements on a 5-point scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My leader articulates a clear vision for the future of the airline.					
My leader inspires and motivates employees to exceed their expectations in delivering exceptional customer service.					
My leader encourages innovation in operations to improve the airline's efficiency.					
My leader does not take an active role in resolving operational challenges.					
My leader avoids making decisions when needed in critical situations, such as handling flight delays or safety issues.					
My leader rarely communicates with the team during operational disruptions					
My leader monitors and assesses my performance regularly.					
My leader provides clear guidelines and expectations for achieving operational targets, such as on-time flight performance.					
My leader rewards employees for meeting performance goals (e.g., flight schedules, customer service).					

SECTION C: OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY

14. Over the last three years, our airline's On-Time Performance (OTP) has been consistently:

- Very Low (0% -25%)
- Low (26% - 50%)
- Moderate (51% -75%)
- High (76% -100%)
- Very High

15. The occurrence of safety incidents in our airline over the last three years has been:

- Very High (76%-100%)
- High (51%-75%)
- Moderate (26%-50%)
- Low (0%-25%)
- Very Low

16. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the average level of client satisfaction over the last three years?

- 1 – Very Low Satisfaction
- 2 – Low Satisfaction
- 3 – Neutral Satisfaction
- 4 – High Satisfaction
- 5 – Very High Satisfaction

17. Over the last three years, the percentage of scheduled flights cancelled by our airline has been:

- Very High (76%-100%)
- High (51%-75%)
- Moderate (26%-50%)
- Low (0%-25%)

18. Our airline's average customer retention rate over the last three years has been:

- Very Low (0%-25%)
- Low (26%-50%)
- Moderate (51%-75%)
- High (76%-100%)

APPENDIX IV: BUDGET

CATEGORY	ACTIVITY	UNIT	UNIT COST KSH)	TOTAL AMOUNT(KSH)
Concept	Printing	20 pages	10	200
Proposal Development	Printing Drafts Binding	80 pages 3	20,100	10,000
Pretesting	Microsoft Forms Questionnaires, printing	Lumpsum	5,000	5,000
Data collection	Training research assistant	1	3,000	3,000
	Research assistants' allowance	1	15,000	15,000
	Printing and photocopying data collection tools	10 pages, 60 questionnaires, other tools	Lumpsum	2,400
	Stationery	Lumpsum	Lumpsum	5,000
Data Analysis	Statistician	1	10,000	10,000
Thesis	Printing and typing, binding	86 pages	lumpsum	15,000
Communication	Mobile phone airtime	Airtime	5,000	5,000
	Internet services	Internet charges	Wi-Fi	10,000
Stationery	Pens and notebooks	20 items	Lumpsum	4,000
Transport to study sites & Authorization	Fuel	30 days	Lumpsum	15,000
Authority/Permit		permit fees-once	lumpsum	1,050
Grand total	-	-	-	100,650
Contingency	Contingency 10%	%	-	10,000

APPENDIX V: WORKPLAN

	Feb 2025 to March 2025	March 2025 – April 2025	March 2025 – April 2025	April 2025	May 2025
Proposal Development					
Ethical Clearance					
Data Collection					
Data Analysis					
Results Presentation and Dissemination					

APPENDIX VI: ETHICS APPROVAL



16th April 2025

Ms Munene Judy,
wahujudy@gmail.com

Dear Ms Munene,

RE: Influence of Leadership Styles on Operational Excellence of Airline Industry in Kenya

This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and approved your above SU-masters proposal. Your application reference number is SU-ISERC2871/25. The approval period is from 16th April 2025 to 15th April 2026.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used.
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours of notification.
- iv. Any changes anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours.
- v. Clearance for the export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to the expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days of completion of the study to SU-ISERC.

Before commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke/> and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Ambrose Rachier,
Chairperson; SU-ISERC

APPENDIX VII: NACOSTI APPROVAL



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Ref No: **840452**



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

Date of Issue: **08/April/2026**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms., Judy Munene of Strathmore University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nairobi on the topic: INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE OF AIRLINE INDUSTRY IN KENYA for the period ending : 08/April/2026.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/25/418140**

Applicant Identification Number: **840452**

Director General
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

Verification QR Code



NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.

See overleaf for conditions