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PROJECT MANAGEMENT

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT AND CERTIFICATION PRACTICES IN PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: EVIDENCE FROM KENYA'S COFFEE SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study examined the effect of organizational alignment on the relationship between certification practices and project implementation in the coffee sector of Kiambu County, Kenya. It focused on how alignment between farming practices, organizational structures, and certification standards influences implementation outcomes.

Statement of the Problem: Coffee farmers in Kiambu County continue to face challenges in effectively implementing certification practices, resulting in inefficiencies and inconsistent product quality. While certification offers benefits such as improved market access and sustainability, limited empirical evidence exists on how organizational alignment shapes its effectiveness. Misalignment in farming practices, knowledge systems may undermine project performance and competitiveness.

Methodology: A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, targeting coffee farmers, project managers, and key stakeholders. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were applied to test relationships and moderation effects.

Findings: Certification practices had a strong positive effect on project implementation ($R = 0.834$; $R^2 = 0.696$). Organizational alignment showed a positive but statistically insignificant moderating effect, with only a marginal increase in model explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.697$). This indicates that certification practices are the dominant drivers of project success.

Conclusion: The study concludes that while organizational alignment supports implementation, its moderating effect is limited. Effective certification practices remain the primary determinants of project performance.

Recommendations: Strengthen quality management, training, and sustainability compliance. Enhance alignment through targeted capacity building, and support farmers with policy and resource frameworks that facilitate certification adoption.

Keywords: *Organizational Alignment, Certification Practices, Project Implementation, Coffee Sector, Kiambu County, Agricultural Projects, Certification Standards, Quality Management, Sustainable Agriculture, Project Success*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Implementation of projects is a critical determinant of organizational success, as it defines the ability of firms to achieve strategic objectives and realize intended operational outcomes. Across sectors, particularly in production-based industries, project success is commonly evaluated based on the achievement of predetermined goals within constraints of time, cost, and resources (Djaelani et al., 2021). However, successful project implementation extends beyond the delivery of outputs to include efficiency in execution, effective coordination, stakeholder satisfaction, and the capacity to adapt to changing conditions (Unegbu et al., 2022). In organizational contexts, this translates into improved resource utilization, reduced operational inefficiencies, and stronger stakeholder relationships, all of which contribute to long-term growth and institutional credibility (Scheepers et al., 2022).

Within the global agricultural economy, coffee remains a key sector, particularly in regions such as Kiambu County, Kenya, where it supports the livelihoods of many smallholder farmers (Nyoro, 2019). Despite its importance as a major agricultural export, the sector faces persistent challenges, including climate variability, limited access to modern farming practices, infrastructural constraints, and weak cooperative governance structures (Gitau & Sang, 2022). These challenges undermine the sector's ability to produce consistent and high-quality outputs. In response, certification practices have emerged as essential mechanisms for enforcing quality standards, improving resource efficiency, and promoting sustainability, thereby enhancing project implementation performance (Hammed et al., 2023).

Certification schemes such as Fair Trade, Organic, and Rainforest Alliance have gained prominence in driving sustainable agricultural practices. However, certification alone does not guarantee improved performance outcomes. Effective project implementation depends on how well these certification practices are embedded within organizational systems. Organizational alignment plays a critical role in this process by ensuring that strategic goals, operational processes, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms are consistently linked to certification requirements (Peixoto et al., 2023). When such alignment is achieved, certification practices are more effectively integrated, increasing the likelihood of improved project outcomes (Rahul, 2024).

To understand such a dynamic, the Resource-Based View (RBV) offers the theoretical basis. RBV focuses on the fact that organizations should focus on creating sustainable competitive advantage by employing valuable, rare, inimitable, and organized capabilities (Barney, 1991). Certification practice and organizational fit together form a strategic strength that leads to project success in the case of certification-based projects in the coffee sector by facilitating better coordination, decreasing variability in processes, and meeting quality standards (Kaluyu et al., 2022).

Additionally, in Kenya, coffee farmers are also affected by serious problems associated with a lack of coordination, insufficient access to markets, and variable prices of coffee products, which tend to create poor implementation performances of the coffee projects (Agriculture and Food Authority, 2022). The coffee market platform is a crucial facilitator in this regard, as it enhances more effective interaction between certified coffee farmers, buyers, and consumers and thus fosters transparency, traceability, and market availability (Maspul, 2023). The fact that the coffee market platform was integrated with certification practices further supports the significance of strategic alignment as it bridges the gap between the market mechanisms and the implementation of a project to help farmers to comply with certification standards and make the entire project more successful (Freitas et al., 2024).

Although the role of certification and quality management in the success of project execution is being acknowledged, especially to the coffee industry, there are a limited number of empirical studies on the moderating effects of organizational alignment to certification-based project execution. Most of the current literature addresses the immediate advantages of certification in and of itself (Hammed et al., 2023; Shafiq et al., 2019), without considering the possibility of alignment to better integrate these practices into the organizational systems and increase the results of the implementation. With the increasing implementation of certification systems within agricultural systems of smallholders, there is an urgent necessity to explore how the alignment of the organization affects successful implementation of certification standards and improvement in project performance (Gitau & Sang, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

In Kiambu County, Kenya, the coffee sector is a vital component of the regional economy, contributing significantly to both local livelihoods and national exports. Despite its

potential, the sector has faced persistent challenges in achieving optimal performance, particularly in project implementation. Recent statistics highlight a troubling decline in coffee production, with overall output dropping by 25.81% between 2017 and 2021 (Agriculture and Food Authority, 2022). This decline is partly attributed to inefficiencies in the implementation of key projects aimed at revitalizing the coffee sector, such as the Kenya National Coffee Reference Point and the Coffee Shade Tree Planting and Biogas Production Projects (Kenya Coffee Producers Association, 2022).

These challenges are compounded by issues within the cooperative structures that dominate smallholder coffee production, including a lack of transparency and poor governance, which hinder the efficient use of resources and undermine the success of project initiatives. Furthermore, while certification programs have been introduced to enhance sustainability and quality control, smallholder farmers in Kiambu County often face barriers to adopting and maintaining these certifications, including high costs, lack of awareness, and insufficient support (Gashema, 2023). These barriers have stifled the sector's growth and prevented it from achieving its potential in the global market.

Despite the growing body of literature on certification and quality management in various industries, there remains a significant gap in research examining the moderating role of organizational alignment in the context of certification-driven project implementation in the coffee sector, particularly in smallholder settings. Existing studies have focused on the direct effects of certification on project outcomes but have largely ignored how alignment between organizational strategies and project goals can influence the success of such initiatives (Shafiq et al., 2019; Hammed et al., 2023). This gap is particularly evident in Kenya's coffee sector, where there is limited empirical evidence on how organizational alignment impacts the successful integration of certification practices into project implementation.

Moreover, the coffee market platform, which facilitates the link between producers and markets, is underutilized in its potential to enhance project outcomes. As more certification systems are adopted, it is crucial to understand how well-aligned organizations can leverage these platforms to improve project performance and competitiveness in the global coffee market.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of organizational alignment on the implementation of certification practices in the coffee sector in Kiambu County, Kenya. Specifically, the study aims to assess how alignment between organizational strategies and project goals moderates the relationship between certification practices and project implementation performance. By focusing on this moderating effect, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how well-aligned organizations can effectively leverage certification frameworks to enhance the performance of agricultural projects, particularly in the context of smallholder coffee farming.

The research also aims to provide empirical evidence on the role of organizational alignment in maximizing the benefits of certification, such as improved process efficiency, enhanced stakeholder satisfaction, and better market access. Furthermore, the study will evaluate the impact of quality management, training and development, and adherence to sustainability protocols in strengthening organizational alignment and driving successful project implementation outcomes. This investigation will provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in successfully implementing certification-driven projects within the agricultural sector, offering valuable insights for policymakers, project managers, and certification bodies.

Justification of the Study

This study is of significant relevance for both academic and practical purposes. In the academic domain, it contributes to the limited body of literature exploring the moderating role of organizational alignment within the context of certification-based projects, especially in smallholder agricultural systems. While existing research has examined the direct effects of certification on project outcomes, few studies have explored how alignment between organizational strategies and project goals influences the success of certification initiatives (Shafiq et al., 2019; Hammed et al., 2023). This research fills this gap by providing a nuanced understanding of how alignment can enhance the effectiveness of certification practices in agricultural projects.

In practice, the findings of this study are highly relevant to the coffee sector in Kenya, which faces significant challenges in project implementation. Kiambu County, being one of the leading coffee producers in the country, stands to benefit from a more efficient and

effective application of certification practices, particularly in improving the sustainability and competitiveness of smallholder farmers. By focusing on the moderating effect of organizational alignment, this study provides practical insights into how cooperative bodies, certification agencies, and farmers can work together more effectively to improve project outcomes. This research will inform the development of strategies that enhance alignment between organizational structures, stakeholders, and certification standards, leading to improved project success rates.

Additionally, the study has policy implications for the government and organizations involved in agricultural development. Policymakers can use the findings to design better frameworks that facilitate the institutionalization of certification practices, enhance stakeholder engagement, and promote the alignment of organizational goals with sector-wide objectives. This, in turn, can foster more resilient and sustainable agricultural systems, improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and the competitiveness of the Kenyan coffee industry on the global stage.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For this study, the Theory of Constraints (TOC) will serve as the core theoretical framework. The Theory of Constraints, developed by Goldratt (1984), emphasizes that organizations often face a central bottleneck or limiting factor that hinders their ability to achieve greater success. The theory suggests that by identifying and addressing this constraint, organizations can optimize performance and improve outcomes across various processes and systems.

In the context of this study, TOC will be applied to examine how organizational alignment influences the effectiveness of certification practices in coffee sector projects. The theory posits that in complex project environments—such as the coffee sector—there are often constraints or inefficiencies that limit project implementation success. These constraints could include factors such as lack of training, misalignment of resources, or inefficiencies in adopting sustainability practices.

TOC provides a lens through which organizational alignment can be viewed as a strategy to alleviate these constraints, improving how certification practices are implemented and enhancing project outcomes. By focusing on the most pressing limitations within the project execution process, the study will explore how aligning resources, systems, and

stakeholder efforts can help overcome these barriers. Certification practices like quality management, training, and sustainability protocols, when aligned and optimized, can mitigate the constraints that hinder project implementation, leading to better performance outcomes.

In this framework, the moderating role of organizational alignment is crucial, as it determines how effectively the organization's resources, strategies, and certification practices work together to address project implementation challenges. The TOC allows the study to analyze the impact of structured quality systems within a larger systemic context, providing insights into how constraints in project implementation can be managed or eliminated through strategic alignment and certification practices.

Thus, the Theory of Constraints offers a robust foundation for understanding how organizational alignment serves as a key driver for overcoming the limitations in certification-driven project implementation, especially in the context of the coffee sector.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Evidence has continually pointed out the importance of certification practices in the improvement of project implementation especially in industries where quality management, alignment of resources and compliance with industry standards are of utmost importance. It has been indicated that certification programs, which include quality management to sustainability procedures, are central towards enhancing project performance by promoting systematic procedures, accountability, and general performance of the project.

Research in the agricultural industry has revealed that certification procedures are significant tools of enhancing efficiency in operations and implementation of projects. Gitau and Sang (2022) investigated the effect of certification practices in coffee industry, focusing on Kenya, and discovered that certifications, i.e. Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance, had a tremendous effect of enhancing the compliance of farmers to industry standards, which positively influenced the result of production quality and successful project implementation. In the same way, Chow et al. (2021) identified that certification models improve traceability, productivity, and market access, which additionally encourage successful project results.

Hammed et al. (2023), in a more comprehensive study, highlighted the significance of the Total Quality Management (TQM) within the project-based sectors and revealed that the structured quality systems play a vital role in boosting the success of the project. Their study indicates that the adoption of TQM especially in the agricultural industry results in less variation in the process and an enhanced coordinating of the stakeholders, which is critical in successful implementation of projects. This highlights the fundamental importance of certification systems in harmonizing practices and having a uniform quality and performance result.

The fact that organizational alignment can be of significant importance in project success is also supported by empirical evidence in the matter of certification based systems. As Peixoto et al. (2023) explained, organizational alignment contributes to the reduction of project-related activities, ensuring better coordination and reduced inefficiencies. According to their research, strategic goal alignment, operational practices, and resource allocation was one of the most crucial elements of project success especially where the certification requirements were complicated such as in the case of agriculture.

Moreover, Rahul (2024) discovered that projects undertaken by well-aligned organizations have high chances of meeting the deadline, operating within the budget, and fulfilling the established goals. This orientation guarantees that the members of the team are all moving towards the same direction thus making the implementation of projects easier. The study also has pointed out that misalignment, conversely, tends to result in disjointed work, inefficiency, and time wastage, and these challenges are more evident in those industries that are dependent on intricate certifications and regulatory processes.

The issue of organizational alignment as a mediator of the relationship between certification practices and project implementation has been receiving growing interest. Waldt (2016) saw the value of organizational alignment as a catalyst to maximize the benefits of certification practices, especially where certification systems are complex and need to coordinate attempts of different parties such as coffee production. This opinion was also supported by Kant et al. (2022), who proved that organizational alignment enhances the effectiveness of certification processes on the success of the project since the resources, capabilities, and stakeholder engagement are aligned with the strategic goals of the project.

The same view is also supported by empirical research conducted by Pratami et al. (2023), who found that alignment in organizations is a necessary factor that guarantees that certification requirements would not be perceived as compliance but rather as part of the strategy in executing projects. When certification practices are registered with the organizational objectives, then they do not only bring in efficiency but also improve the sustainability and scalability of the projects.

Moderating Effects of Projects of Certification.

The aligning effect of organizational alignment on certification-based projects has been especially significant in research on the smallholder agricultural systems. Eise and Rawat (2021) concluded that organizational alignment was essential in enhancing the project implementation outcomes in smallholder coffee projects in Kenya. The structures were usually not aligned and this resulted in delay, wastage of resources and inability to satisfy certification standard. Nevertheless, project performance was significantly greater in the case of alignment of the organizational strategy, certification practices and operational process.

Besides, Hussain et al. (2020) investigated how alignment could be relevant to implementing sustainability protocols in agricultural projects. Their research suggested that more aligned organizations were more effective at integrating sustainability standards into project implementation that led to the desired improvement of the environmental and social results. This brings out the significance of ensuring that organizational strategies are aligned to the certification standards in ensuring the successful implementation of the project especially in certification-oriented agricultural industry such as coffee production.

Empirical literature is consistent with the hypothesis that certification practices are key to the successful project implementation in agricultural settings. Studies suggest that the organized certification systems help increase the efficiency of the operations, the coordination level, and the performance final results. Moreover, organizational alignment is very critical in the mediation of the effects of certification practices in the success of the project, especially in aligning the organizational processes, resources, and strategies in line with the certification requirements.

This literature provides an emphasis on the importance of certification practices in creating a successful project and provides the moderating impact of organizational alignment in

ensuring that such practices are as effective as possible. This literature gap, however, is knowledge about the particular moderating role of organizational alignment on the application of certification practices on smallholder coffee projects and this study aims at filling this gap.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research philosophy employed in this study is positivist, the focus being on objective reality that is measurable and can be tested with the help of empirical evidence. A cross-sectional research design was utilized, this provided an opportunity to gather data on stakeholders of certification-based coffee projects in the Kiambu County in Kenya at one point in time. The research combines descriptive and explanatory designs to investigate the properties of important variables and their relationship to each other, especially the moderating role of organizational alignment in the relationship between certification practices and project implementation.

The target population included coffee farmers, project managers, supervisors, and cooperative leaders working on certification-based projects. A stratified random sample was used to provide a representation of the relevant subgroups, and coffee farmers were used as the basic unit of analysis. The Yamane formula was employed to select a sample size that would be more representative and reliable.

Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. The questionnaires contained Likert-scale closed items regarding certification practices, organizational congruence, and project implementation. Complementary qualitative information was obtained through key informant interviews. Spreadsheet analysis was performed by SPSS, with the application of descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. To determine the interaction effect of organizational alignment, moderation analysis was conducted, and diagnostic tests of normality, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity were used to test the robustness of the model.

Expert review and factor analysis ensured validity, and Cronbach alpha coefficients greater than 0.7 ensured reliability. Informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation were fully respected, and ethical approval was secured.

But the limitation of cross-sectional data impedes the ability to draw conclusions about causality and self-reported answers can contribute to social desirability bias, which can affect the validity of results.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis shows that organizational alignment was rated highly by respondents across all six measurement items, with an overall mean of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.90, indicating a strong and fairly consistent perception that farming operations are aligned with certification requirements. The strongest-rated item was the statement that there is a strong alignment between coffee farming objectives and the goals of certification programs, which recorded a mean of 4.19 and a standard deviation of 0.85. On this item, 41.7% of respondents agreed and 41.7% strongly agreed, while only 5.7% disagreed and 11.0% were neutral. This pattern shows that more than four out of every five respondents perceived a direct connection between their production goals and certification expectations, suggesting that certification is not viewed as an external obligation alone but as part of farm-level operational direction.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
My farming practices consistently align with the goals of the coffee certifications I pursue.	0.00%	10.30%	11.00%	40.30%	38.30%	4.07	0.95
The training and knowledge I have align well with the requirements of coffee certification standards.	0.00%	7.30%	10.30%	41.30%	41.00%	4.16	0.89
I am able to adapt my farming practices effectively to meet changing certification requirements.	0.00%	7.00%	9.30%	43.30%	40.30%	4.17	0.87
There is a strong alignment between my coffee farming objectives and the goals of certification programs.	0.00%	5.70%	11.00%	41.70%	41.70%	4.19	0.85

I ensure that my approach to coffee farming is continuously updated to comply with certification standards.	0.00%	11.30 %	9.30%	44.00 %	35.30%	4.03	0.95
I find it easy to modify my farming techniques and practices to adhere to new or evolving certification standards	0.00%	8.30%	9.00%	41.70 %	41.00%	4.15	0.9
Average						**4.12**	**0.90**

The results also indicate that the respondents felt that they were competent enough to adapt to the changing certification requirements. The arm on the capacity to modify the farming practices well to suit the changing certification standards registered an average of 4.17 and standard deviation of 0.87 with 43.3 percent asserts affirming and 40.3 percent as strongly affirming. Only the 7.0% differed and 9.3% were neutral. Alternatively closely linked to this, the 15 respondents question on whether they find it easy to adjust the farming techniques and practices to meet new or emerging certification standards recorded a mean of 4.15 and standard deviation of 0.90 with 41.7 and 41.0 respectively indicating that 41.7 and 41.0 percent said yes and strongly yes respectively. These numbers suggest that farmers tend to consider themselves operationally flexible, which is a critical requirement to be able to maintain compliance in a setting where the certification standards might change over time in accordance with the market, environmental, and traceability needs.

In the descriptive results also came out strongly training and knowledge alignment. The claim that the training and knowledge gained is in tandem with the requirements of coffee certification standards also attained a mean of 4.16 and a standard deviation of 0.89. On a percentage basis, 41.3 and 41.0 percent of the respondents said yes and strongly yes respectively with only 7.3 and 10.3 saying no and indifferent respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents felt that knowledge support that was accessible to them was pertinent to certification compliance. This outcome is significant as these aspects of training and knowledge transfer play a major role in the actual application of certification standards especially in smallholder systems where compliance is usually determined by how well the farmer comprehends record keeping, input application, environment management, and post-harvest management routines.

The item that said that farming practices are always in line with the objectives of the coffee certifications sought was averaging 4.07 with a standard deviation of 0.95. In this case,

40.3% said yes and 38.3% said strongly yes, implying that 78.6 percent of the respondents provided a positive response. Nevertheless, there was also 10.3% disagreement and 11.0% neutrality with this item, which implies that despite a high level of alignment in general, a significant number of respondents might experience operational gaps between certification requirements and everyday practice. The same tendency is seen in the statement that respondents keep on changing their approach towards coffee farming to meet the requirements of the certification that had a mean of 4.03 with the standard deviation of 0.95, the lowest amongst the six items. Here, 44.0 percent concurred and 35.3 percent strongly concurred, 11.3 percent disagreed and 9.3 percent were neutral. This implies that despite the majority of farmers being keen to ensure they do not go out of line, constant updating can be harder than generally trying to be on the same side maybe due to the fact that it requires constant access to information, resources and technological assistance.

Combined, the descriptive statistics create a clear image of an industry whereby the level of organization alignment is at a relatively high level. The average of all items was more than 4. 00 and there was no statement that reportedly got responses of strongly disagree, which indicates the tendency of the attitude towards certification-related alignment was mostly positive. The fact that standard deviations are rather small (between 0.85 and 0.95) also demonstrates that the responses were not spread widely and the agreement pattern was quite consistent among respondents. This uniformity reinforces the sense that the farmers of Kiambu County tend to believe that their organizational practices, systems of knowledge and their operational goals are consistent with certification.

Despite that, the descriptive results also indicate that alignment does not solely describe the success of implementation. Strategic fit and adaptability had the greatest levels of agreement, with relatively lower scores on the items of continuous updating and day-to-day operational consistency. This implies that as much as respondents are aware of certification objectives and support them on the whole, there is still a possibility that practical mechanisms of greater strength like quality management systems, regular training and adherence to sustainability requirements should be used. In such a manner, the descriptive analysis upholds the overall finding of the paper: organizational fit is good and facilitating but the practical implementation of certification practices is the more influential in the definition of project implementation performance within the coffee industry of the Kiambu County.

Inferential Analysis

The moderating influence of organizational alignment on the relationship between certification practices and project implementation was evaluated through a two-step regression analysis. The first step involved assessing the direct effect of certification practices on project implementation outcomes, while the second step incorporated organizational alignment as a moderating variable. The results offer critical insights into the dynamics of these variables and their influence on the performance of coffee projects in Kiambu County.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Direct Effect	0.834	0.696	0.693	0.32019
Moderated Effect	0.835	0.697	0.693	0.32003

The model summary highlights the strong positive relationship between certification practices and project implementation in both the direct effect and moderated effect models. The R values for the direct effect (0.834) and the moderated effect (0.835) are nearly identical, suggesting that organizational alignment does not significantly alter the strength of the relationship between the predictor variables and project outcomes. The R Square values of 0.696 and 0.697 indicate that certification practices account for approximately 69.6% of the variance in project implementation performance. The addition of organizational alignment as a moderating variable only slightly increases the explanatory power of the model (by 0.1%), suggesting that the primary drivers of project success remain rooted in the certification practices themselves. This finding is consistent with previous studies that indicate that organizational alignment, while important, may not always be a substantial contributor to the overall project performance when other variables, such as certification practices, are already strongly influencing outcomes (Akwabi et al., 2021). The ANOVA results for both models indicate that the regression models are statistically significant, with p-values less than 0.001.

The ANOVA results for the direct effect is as detailed below.

Table 3: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares (Regression)	df (Regression)	Mean Square (Regression)	F	Sig.
Direct Effect	69.379	3	23.126	225.572	0.000
Moderated Effect	69.511	4	17.378	169.67	0.000

The F-statistic for the direct effect model is 225.572, indicating a robust relationship between certification practices and project outcomes. In comparison, the F-statistic for the moderated effect model drops to 169.67, reflecting the inclusion of organizational alignment as an additional variable, which, while statistically significant, does not drastically improve the fit of the model. This slight decrease in the F-statistic suggests that organizational alignment, although important, might not have as pronounced an impact on project implementation outcomes as initially expected. Nonetheless, the statistical significance of both models supports the notion that the predictors, as a group, are valuable in explaining project performance, as evidenced by the high F-values in both cases (Scheepers et al., 2022).

The coefficient of regression results is further demonstrated in Table 4.20 below. In the regression analysis, the coefficients for the direct effect model demonstrate that quality management ($B = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$), training and development ($B = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$), and adherence to sustainability ($B = 0.313$, $p < 0.001$) all have a significant positive impact on project implementation.

Table 4: Coefficient of Regression

Model	Predictors	B (Unstandardized Coefficients)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized Coefficients)	t	Sig.
Direct Effect	Quality Management, Training and Development, Adherence to Sustainability	0.353, 0.223, 0.313	0.038, 0.026, 0.036	0.371, 0.326, 0.336	9.278, 8.681, 8.690	0.000, 0.000, 0.000
Moderated Effect	Quality Management, Training and Development, Adherence to Sustainability, Organizational Alignment	0.355, 0.223, 0.310, 0.043	0.038, 0.026, 0.036, 0.038	0.373, 0.327, 0.333, 0.037	9.327, 8.710, 8.593, 1.137	0.000, 0.000, 0.000, 0.256

These coefficients are consistent with the results of prior studies, which highlight the significance of designed quality management, continuous training, and sustainability compliance in enhancing project performance (Favoretto and Carvalho, 2021; Huang et al., 2023). The findings of the direct effect model also indicate that the practices serve as a key contributor to the project goal achievement, which further confirms their importance in the efficiency and effectiveness of project implementation (Shafiq et al., 2019).

The findings showed that organizational alignment had a small effect on project implementation when introduced as a moderating variable. The organizational alignment coefficient (B = 0.043, p = 0.256) was statistically insignificant, and in this instance, the organizational alignment does not significantly alter the correlation between certification practices and project implementation. This is supported by research like that by Peixoto et al. (2023), which indicate that organizational alignment can support project implementation, but its impact can be indirect to the more direct influences of quality

management and training. Moreover, the comparatively low p-value (p = 0.256) of organizational alignment further confirms the idea that its effects are not as significant as those of the other predictors are.

The standardized coefficients (8) of the two models indicate that quality management (= 0.373), training and development (= 0.327), and compliance with sustainability (= 0.333) are the most significant in influencing project implementation outcomes. Organizational alignment, in turn, displays a comparatively low standardized coefficient (= 0.037), meaning that it does not contribute significantly to the overall performance of the model. This result aligns with the study by Dubois and Silvius (2020), which emphasizes that more directly project-related factors, such as quality management practices and sustainability compliance, are more likely to impact the project outcomes than organizational alignment.

Overall, this analysis revealed the importance of certification practices, particularly quality management, training, and compliance with sustainability in facilitating successful project implementation. Although it is true that organizational alignment is a factor in the overall implementation of certification practices, its moderating role seems to be minor in this regard. This would imply that organizations can deliver superior project results by strong certification measures and resource investments in quality and sustainability, organizational alignment is more of a facilitating force than an initiating driver. These results are consistent with the opinions of Akwabi et al. (2021) and Shafiq et al. (2019) who note that organizational alignment is crucial yet should not be overemphasized as an independent factor in the effectiveness of project implementation in certification-based systems.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to assess the effects of certification behavior and moderation of organizational congruency on implementation of a project in the coffee industry of Kiambu County, Kenya. The results demonstrate that the quality management, training and development, and compliance with sustainability measures are certification practices that have a significant impact on the outcome of project implementation. The practices help the coffee projects to be more efficient, of high quality and successful in order to fulfill both the internal and external standards.

Although organizational alignment is significant in the context of efficient incorporation of certification practices into organizational routine, it did not have a significant moderating impact here. The major forces behind the success of the project still stayed entrenched in the disciplined quality and certification measures, and not organizational alignment. It is important to note that although alignment is very important to the effectiveness of operational cohesion and coordination, certification practice proves to be the more effective predictors of project implementation in the coffee industry.

All in all, this research makes a contribution to the accumulation of the existing knowledge on the topic of project management in certification-based farming. It highlights the need to institutionalize the quality management practices in the agricultural projects and particularly the smallholder systems where the variability, as well as decentralization of business, usually pose challenges. This study shows that to achieve sustainability in global markets and help farmers to be more competitive, the policy should support certification and that the implementation should be handled by managers to fully integrate sound certification systems within the farming sector.

RECOMMENDATION

Several specific and practical strategies are suggested to make the certification practices more effective and the implementation of the project more successful in the sphere of coffee in the Kiambu County.

First, the institutionalization of the organized quality management systems in cooperation level is required. The cooperation of coffee should implement standard operating procedures that meet the certification standards such as regular internal audits, record-keeping templates, and checklists of compliance. This will provide uniformity in implementation and minimize inconsistency in farming practices among the small hold farmers.

Second, the capacity-building programs are to be redesigned as continuous, practical and local. Rather than having a single training session, the stakeholders are supposed to adopt the use of constant on-farm training, demonstration plots, and peer-learning models where the certified farmers train others. It is also possible to use digital extension tools (e.g., mobile-based advisory services) and offer real-time advice on certification compliance and optimal farming practices.

Third, to overcome financial constraints, policy makers and development partners must present subsidized certification programmes and financial assistance systems. These can be: cost-sharing arrangements on certification audit, availability of low-interest credit facilities, and certification compliance input subsidies. Resource pooling can also be promoted by cooperative societies to lower the costs of individual farmers that are tied to the certification procedures.

Fourth, organizational alignment must be reinforced by working on practical integration and not abstract goals of alignment. Planning, resource allocation, and performance monitoring systems of cooperatives and project managers should be aligned to the certification standards. This may be done by incorporation of certification indicators into the performance evaluation schemes and tying them down to incentives to farmers and managers.

Fifth, integrated market linkage and trace systems need to be developed. There should be increased digital platforms that link farmers to buyers to open up the avenues of transparency, better price realizations and to encourage compliance with certification. These systems will also strengthen alignment because the certification practices will be directly connected to economic rewards.

Lastly, government bodies must enhance the extension services and institutional support systems, whereby the smallholder farmers are given the technical advice, regulatory support and timely information on the changing certification standards. This will minimize gaps in knowledge and improve the sustainability of long-term certification based projects.

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