



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A DETERMINANT OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: This paper examines the role of strategic organizational culture in shaping women's leadership effectiveness within institutional settings, with particular focus on cooperative financial organizations. The study seeks to move beyond the emphasis on representation to explore how cultural dynamics influence leadership participation.

METHODS: The study adopts a systematic literature review approach guided by the PRISMA framework. Relevant literature was sourced from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, as well as institutional reports. The review synthesizes both theoretical and empirical studies aligned to organizational culture and women's leadership effectiveness.

FINDINGS: The review establishes that inclusive and participatory organizational cultures significantly enhance women's leadership effectiveness by promoting legitimacy, trust, and access to strategic decision-making processes. In contrast, hierarchical and exclusionary cultures constrain leadership authority and limit effectiveness, even where formal gender-inclusive policies exist. The findings further indicate that organizational culture interacts with governance structures and institutional frameworks to shape leadership outcomes.

CONCLUSION: Strategic organizational culture emerges as a critical determinant of women's leadership effectiveness. Nonetheless, existing literature remains fragmented, with limited focus on cooperative institutions and insufficient integration of cultural and institutional dynamics. This underscores the need for more context-specific and analytically robust studies.

RECOMMENDATION: Organizations should prioritize the development of inclusive cultures that support equitable leadership participation. Policy frameworks should be reinforced through cultural transformation initiatives, and leadership development programs should be aligned with organizational culture.

Keywords: *Strategic organizational culture, women's leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, gender and leadership, cooperative governance, SACCOs, institutional factors*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The participation of women in organizational leadership has remained a major subject of scholarly, institutional, and policy concern because of its connection with governance quality, organizational accountability, strategic decision-making, and inclusive development (Eagly & Heilman, 2022). Women's leadership effectiveness refers to the extent to which women leaders exercise legitimate authority and influence strategic decisions within institutional settings (Yukl, 2013). It also reflects their ability to mobilize institutional support, strengthen governance processes, and contribute to organizational performance outcomes (Paoloni *et al.*, 2023). While many organizations have adopted gender-inclusive policies and increased women's representation in leadership structures, representation alone does not guarantee meaningful participation or real influence in governance processes (Hoobler *et al.*, 2018). This distinction has shifted scholarly attention from merely counting women in leadership positions to examining the organizational conditions that enable women to lead, influence decisions, and contribute substantively to institutional performance (Ng *et al.*, 2024).

Organizational culture is one of the key internal conditions that shape leadership effectiveness because it defines the values, assumptions, norms, and informal practices through which authority and participation are distributed within institutions (Schein, 2017). In this study, strategic organizational culture is understood as the shared system of beliefs, behavioral expectations, and governance practices that influence how leadership roles are accepted, supported, and exercised in pursuit of organizational goals (Denison, 1990). Culture also determines how legitimacy, voice, trust, and decision-making power are allocated within organizational settings (Nishii, 2013). Empirical studies show that inclusive, participatory, and collaborative cultures strengthen women's leadership effectiveness by improving access to decision-making spaces and reducing gendered barriers to authority (Gallego & Gutiérrez, 2021). In contrast, hierarchical, male-dominated, and exclusionary cultures can weaken women's leadership influence by preserving informal power structures that restrict participation, visibility, and strategic voice (Gregory, 2022).

The relevance of organizational culture is particularly strong within cooperative financial institutions because their governance systems are shaped by both formal rules and informal member-based relationships (Cornforth, 2004). In such institutions, leadership effectiveness goes beyond holding an official position; it involves the ability to influence governance decisions, build trust among members, guide collective action, and support institutional

sustainability (Yukl, 2013). Cooperative institutions such as SACCOs operate through democratic control, member participation, elected leadership, and community-based accountability, making culture central to how women leaders are accepted and empowered within governance structures (SACCO Societies Regulatory Authority, 2024). Where inclusive cultures exist, women leaders are more likely to gain legitimacy, participate meaningfully in strategic deliberations, and contribute to improved governance outcomes (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2023). Where informal exclusion, gender stereotypes, and male-dominated networks persist, women may hold leadership positions without exercising substantial influence over decisions (Kamau & Waweru, 2023).

Despite growing scholarship on gender and leadership, the existing literature remains limited in three important ways. First, many studies emphasize women's representation, board diversity, and gender quotas, while giving less attention to leadership effectiveness as a multidimensional construct involving legitimacy, authority, participation, decision influence, and contribution to organizational outcomes (Post & Byron, 2015). Second, much of the empirical evidence is drawn from corporate organizations and developed economies, where institutional arrangements and cultural dynamics differ from cooperative institutions in emerging markets (Seierstad & Kirton, 2022). Third, limited attention has been given to how organizational culture shapes women's leadership effectiveness in SACCOs and other cooperative financial institutions, despite their important role in financial inclusion, community development, and member-based governance in Kenya (Kibicho & Achieng, 2024). This gap creates the need for a focused review that explains how strategic organizational culture determines women's leadership effectiveness within cooperative institutional settings.

The organizational culture of developing economies and more so the African cooperative institutions is typically defined by a combination of formal systems of governance and informal social norms that also predefine the possibility of leadership opportunities and performance (Adjei and Oduro, 2022; Wanyama and Olweny, 2022). Cultural norms also influence the leadership in cooperative organizations and may be improved by the existence of a democratic membership, collective ownership and high rates of community orientation in cooperative organizations such as Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs), which have a special system of governance (Cornforth, 2004; SACCO Societies Regulatory Authority, 2024). In these settings, women can only be effective in their leadership roles as dictated by the formal institutional frameworks but also by cultural acceptance, legitimacy, and support in the governance processes (Kamau & Waweru, 2023; Kibicho & Achieng, 2024). Nevertheless,

empirical studies on the significance of organizational culture in establishing the effectiveness of women leadership within cooperative financial institutions particularly within the Kenyan context are sparse.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to explore how strategic organizational culture can be used to determine the effectiveness of women in their leadership positions in cooperative institutions. The study will offer a full picture of the impact of cultural dynamics on the participation, legitimacy and performance of women leaders by synthesizing existing theoretical and empirical literature. The paper also highlights missing points in the literature, such as the lack of emphasis of the effectiveness of leadership in the context of the cooperative governance and the lack of emphasis on the interplay of cultural and institutional factors. In so doing, the study contributes to the literature on gender and leadership overall, as it brings the variables, which determine whether women are effective in leadership, closer together and more contextualized.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The study draws its theoretical grounding from Social Role Theory and Institutional Theory, which together provide a coherent basis for explaining how organizational culture shapes women's leadership effectiveness within institutional contexts. These perspectives are particularly relevant in examining how socially constructed expectations and organizational environments interact to influence leadership participation, legitimacy, and performance (Eagly, 1987; Scott, 2014).

Social Role Theory posits that gendered expectations emerge from historically embedded divisions of labor, where men are often associated with agentic roles such as authority and decision-making, while women are associated with communal roles emphasizing support and relational behavior (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). These socially constructed expectations extend into organizational settings, where leadership roles are frequently perceived through a masculine lens, thereby influencing how women leaders are evaluated and accepted within formal governance structures (Eagly & Heilman, 2022; Hoobler *et al.*, 2018). Within such contexts, organizational culture plays a critical role in either reinforcing or challenging these gendered expectations. Cultures that promote inclusivity, collaboration, and equity tend to reduce role incongruity and enhance the legitimacy of women leaders, thereby enabling them to participate more effectively in strategic decision-making processes (Nishii, 2013; Gallego & Gutiérrez, 2021). Conversely, cultures embedded in rigid hierarchies or

traditional norms may perpetuate gender biases, limiting women's authority and constraining their influence within leadership structures (Gregory, 2022; Al-Asfour & Khan, 2022). In this regard, Social Role Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how cultural norms within organizations shape both the perception and enactment of women's leadership effectiveness.

Complementing this perspective, Institutional Theory explains how organizational behavior is shaped by broader systems of rules, norms, and cultural expectations that define what is considered legitimate and acceptable within a given environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014). Organizations are not only driven by efficiency considerations but also by the need to conform to institutional pressures in order to gain legitimacy and ensure survival (Coccia, 2021; OECD, 2021). Within this framework, organizational culture represents a manifestation of institutional forces operating at the organizational level, influencing governance practices, leadership structures, and decision-making processes. Institutional environments characterized by supportive norms, clear governance frameworks, and inclusive policies are more likely to facilitate women's leadership effectiveness by providing both formal and informal legitimacy (Seierstad & Kirton, 2022; Terjesen *et al.*, 2021). However, where institutional pressures are weak or symbolic, organizations may adopt gender-inclusive policies without substantive change, resulting in limited influence of women leaders despite apparent representation (Ohemeng & Amoako-Asiedu, 2021; Chatterjee & Mahajan, 2020). This highlights the importance of examining not only formal structures but also the underlying cultural dynamics that shape leadership outcomes.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives reinforce the argument that women's leadership effectiveness is not solely determined by individual capability but is significantly shaped by the cultural and institutional context within which leadership is exercised. Social Role Theory explains how gendered expectations influence leadership perceptions and behavior, while Institutional Theory situates these dynamics within broader organizational systems that define legitimacy and participation. Consequently, strategic organizational culture emerges as a central mechanism through which these theoretical forces interact, influencing the extent to which women leaders can effectively contribute to governance processes and organizational performance (Schein, 2017; Denison, 1990). This integrated theoretical grounding therefore provides a strong foundation for examining the role of organizational culture in shaping women's leadership effectiveness within cooperative institutions.

Conceptual Review of Strategic Organizational Culture

Strategic organizational culture refers to the values, beliefs, norms, and expectations of how people should relate, make decisions, and use power within an organization (Schein, 2017; Denison, 1990). It surpasses noticeable practices to include entirely held assumptions that influence organizational behavior and influence the way in which leadership roles are demarcated, legitimized, and acted out over time (Schein, 2017; Nishii, 2013). Organizational culture is one of the essential components of strategic construct, which correlates organizational objectives and employee activities and, therefore, determines the results of governance, performance of leadership and organizational performance (Denison, 1990; Coccia, 2021). In this regard, culture is not a background but a core constituent of the allocation of power, authority and inclusion in organizational regimes.

Organizational culture defines how the legitimacy of the leaders can be discussed as the ability to influence the strategic direction and institutional outcomes in the leadership setting (Yukl, 2013; Paoloni *et al.*, 2023). Openness, inclusivity, and collaboration in cultures lead to an environment in which the authority of leadership is shared more fairly, allowing various views to be brought into the decision-making activities (Nishii, 2013; Gallego and Gutiérrez, 2021). Conversely, cultures that rely on deep hierarchies, lack formal power, or marginalization may lead to power being confined to a small number of people, thereby limiting the participation and reducing the performance of non-dominant structures leaders (Gregory, 2022; Al-Asfour and Khan, 2022). These cultural processes are particularly pertinent as far as the practice of leadership is concerned, since they not only determine by whom leadership is wielded, but also by what channel leadership influence is exuded and sustained in the organization.

The strategic position of the organizational culture is even more promoted when we refer to it in the dimension of the effectiveness of the leadership of women. According to empirical research, organizational cultural norms have an important impact on whether women can be offered leadership opportunities and take part in the governance process as well as whether or not they can influence the process of making strategic decisions (Eagly and Heilman, 2022; Hoobler *et al.*, 2018). The higher the probability of being perceived as effective and valid, the higher is the ability of women leaders in inclusive cultures to make substantial contributions to the organizational performance (Gallego and Gutiérrez, 2021; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2023). On the other hand, a culture that promotes gender roles or propagates male-dominated power relations might disrupt the leadership power of women and limit their participation in decision-making, not to mention their performance (Adjei and Oduro, 2022; Gregory, 2022). These restrictions are likely to be present even in the context where the official policies that promote

gender equality, which highlights the significance of the informal cultures in shaping the dynamics of leadership.

Moreover, the organizational culture works as a device by which the institutional expectations are internalized and reproduced in the organizational context, thus supporting or disrupting the existing power structures (Scott, 2014; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The strong levels of trust, participation, and collaboration among the organizational members complement the effectiveness of leadership in the context where the organizational cultural norms resemble the principles of the inclusive governance (Paoloni *et al.*, 2023; Agyemang Mensah and Asante, 2023). However, informal behavior may outweigh formal systems when cultures collide with official systems, and a symbolic process of inclusion may occur where there is no actual influence on leadership (Ohemeng & Amoako-Asiedu, 2021; Chatterjee and Mahajan, 2020). This discussion underscores the essence of designating organizational culture as a structural and behavioral precursor of leadership performance.

Therefore, strategic organizational culture is a highly significant prism in relation to which the effectiveness of women in leadership may be observed since it determines the conditions under which the leadership is exercised, felt and retained. Culture can directly affect the ability of women leaders to contribute to the processes and performance of organisations through perceptions of legitimacy, access to spaces of decision-making and power distribution within organisations (Schein, 2017; Denison, 1990). This conceptualization provides a point of departure in the discussion on how disparities in organizational culture may result in difference in leadership outcomes and hence the importance of culture as an important determinant to the success of women leaders in an institutional context.

METHODOLOGY

The study conducted a systematic literature review with the objective of understanding the influence of strategic organizational culture on the effectiveness of women's leadership in institutional and cooperative governance settings. To enhance transparency, minimize selection bias, and enable someone else to replicate the study process of locating, screening, and synthesizing relevant literature, the review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidance (Bryman, 2021). It was appropriate to conduct a systematic review as evidence on organizational culture and effectiveness of women leaders is dispersed across leadership, gender, governance, management and cooperative development literature (Saunders *et al.*, 2023).

Literature search was carried out in Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect and Google Scholar. The choice of Scopus and Web of Science was made since they index high quality peer reviewed research articles in Management and Social Science. ScienceDirect was added because of the high number of leadership, organizational behavior, and governance studies that were available. Google Scholar was employed as an adjunct source to gather institutional publications and policy documents of the cooperative sector and other reports that might not be included in the other databases.

We used the search strategy with key words which are related to the main constructs of the study. The most common search terms were: organizational culture and women leadership effectiveness, strategic organizational culture and women leadership, gender and leadership and organizational culture, inclusive culture and leadership effectiveness and cooperative governance and women leadership. The terms 'SACCO leadership', 'women in cooperative institutions', 'legitimacy of leadership' and 'participation in decision making' were added to enhance the coverage of institutional and cooperative contexts.

The studies were included if they presented findings and/or research regarding one of the following: organizational culture; women's leadership effectiveness; gender and governance; cooperative governance; institutional support; leadership legitimacy; or decision-making authority. Articles from peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, systematic reviews and credible institutional reports were weighted more highly. For example, seminal theoretical pieces were included when they served as a basis for the study. Studies that only included gender representation but not leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, influence on governance and/or institutional participation were excluded.

There were three stages in the screening process. To eliminate studies that were not relevant, titles were checked. Second, for the abstracts, relevance to the key constructs was assessed. Thirdly, full-text articles were analyzed for their theoretical inclusion, methodological quality and relevance to the study purpose. In order to reduce the potential for bias, multiple databases, different terms, and evidence from a number of methodological traditions such as quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods and review-based studies were used in the review. Through a thematic analysis, the selected literature was analysed from the perspectives of organisational culture, leadership legitimacy, participation in decision-making, informal power structures, influence of governance and cooperation of institutional context.

Empirical Review

Empirical research studies that have examined the relationship between organizational culture and the success of women leaders have evolved overtime in institutional and geographical context, but all the studies have inquired that culture plays a crucial role in determining not only the participation of women in leadership, but also how the leadership can empower women to participate in governing and performance related processes in an organization. Critical analysis of this literature reveals that convergence and divergence of the research findings exists, particularly, when methodological approaches, contextual settings and approaches to analysis are considered.

The empirical studies have largely used the quantitative approach to investigate the relation between the organizational culture and leadership performance in the context of a corporate and formal organization in developed economies. In their case, Gallego and Gutiérrez (2021) relied on a large-sized quantitative study, which is based on the survey data of Spanish companies and applied the Competing Values Framework to categorize the organizational culture into the clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchical groups. In their study, they used regression analysis to test the relationship between culture and gender diversity in leadership and they found that collaborative (clan) cultures positively influenced women participation in leadership and influence whereas hierarchical cultures negatively influenced leadership autonomy. The research is methodologically sound in the sense that validated measurement scales have been employed and powerful statistical method has been employed that provided internal validity to the research. The study however lacks in the sense that it was cross-sectional and therefore, it cannot be inferred as causal and also because it was conducted in corporate environment, this may be inadequate in establishing the role of leadership in cooperative or members based organizations.

To the same end, Gregory (2022) adopted a qualitative case study as a research approach to explore the influence of organizational culture on the advancement of women in the sphere of leadership in the Australian financial institutions. The study according to informal cultural norms and principally the masculine organizational identities showed that the formal gender inclusion policies were often undermined by informal cultural norms, limiting the access of women to strategic decision making rooms. Whilst the qualitative method was highly informative on contextual insights of the lived experiences and informal power relations, the sample was small, which restricts its generalizability. Nevertheless, the study illustrates that there are certain important empirical regularities: formal organizational structures lack

sufficient guarantees to the effectiveness of leadership when they are not supported by inclusive cultural practices.

These results are also confirmed by other empirical studies in the US and Europe. In a meta-analysis of a range of quantitative studies, Post and Byron (2015) determined that gender-diverse leadership structure is positively correlated with improved financial performance and quality of governance structure, particularly in high accountability and inclusive culture organizations. They have high external validity due to their methodological approach that summarizes the work of other studies. The research, however, mainly quantifies results through the performance indicators but not through quantifying the leadership effectiveness as a multidimensional construct thus limiting its explanatory value in explaining the impact of culture on the leadership processes.

The empirical research in the developing economies reveals that there is a more complex interaction between organization culture and the other socio-cultural factors. The article by Tlaiss and Kauser (2023) is a mixed-method study that was conducted in the banking institutions of the Middle Eastern region and included both survey information and qualitative interviews to assess the role of the organizational culture in the effectiveness of women leaders. They also discovered that inclusive organizational cultures give women much confidence, visibility and participation in decision making. The study however found out that informal networks and social expectations are likely to supersede formal organization policies thereby restricting leadership performance despite the apparent inclusiveness. The mixed-methods design enhances analytical richness of the study with the combination of quantitative trends and qualitative insights. However, the results are more contextual and they might not be directly applicable to other institutional contexts.

In a similar fashion, Al-Asfour and Khan (2022) investigated the policies of workforce localization and women access to leadership in the emerging economies through the qualitative research design. Their findings show that culture of organizations which fall under the national-level socio-cultural norms is likely to deter the promotion of women into the top-most posts despite the positive institutional structures. Although the study offers some important information on the relationship between organization and societal culture, it is not quantitatively validated, thus restricting its capacity to extrapolate the results to the wider populations.

The correlation between the organizational culture, the institutional structures and the leadership has been further evidenced by the empirical researches conducted in African settings. In their mixed-method study of cooperative institutions, Adjei and Oduro (2022) discovered that patriarchal norms intricately embedded in organizational cultures were a major limitation in the participation and influence of women in leadership. Their numerical findings revealed that formal systems of governance and their leadership outcomes are weakly correlated with each other suggesting that cultural factors are more predominant in the leadership outcome. Qualitative nature of the research revealed that informal norms, such as the norms of network-based decision making and gendered expectations, have a tendency to marginalize women in the debate about strategies. Despite the abundance of the study of formal and informal dynamics, the research is not as generalizable to other regions of the continent since only a few cooperatives are studied.

In a quantitative study by Agyemang Mensah and Asante (2023), the authors studied the gender diversity and risk management in African financial institutions and tested the correlation between diversity in leadership and organizational results using regression analysis. Their results show that inclusive organizations not only demonstrate improved practices in governance but also have better financial stability and risk management. Nevertheless, the study concentrates mostly on diversity as an outcome variable with little discussion of the direct impact of organizational culture on leadership effectiveness, thus creating a gap in comprehending the underlying processes

Wanyama and Olweny (2022) explored the effectiveness of governance reforms and leadership in cooperative organizations in East Africa by adopting a mixed-methods design. Their results indicate that open governance practices and open organizational cultures promote leadership involvement and institutional performance. However, the research also finds out that there are also endemic issues such as deep-seated informal sources of power and cultural resistance that restrain the success of women leaders. Although it is true that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches enhances the validity of the study, the analysis lacks an explicit model of the relationship between organizational culture and leadership effectiveness; thus, restricting its explanatory accuracy.

In the Kenyan context, empirical studies on SACCOs can give a more direct answer to the question of the impact of the organizational culture on the effectiveness of women in leadership positions. Kobia and Okeyo (2022) used the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument

(OCAI) to conduct a descriptive survey to determine the correlation between culture and leadership outcomes in SACCOs. Their evidence shows that collaborative and member-based cultures are the most effective to promote women in leadership positions and increase their influence on the governance process. The study however is limited by descriptive statistics, where the study fails to ascertain any causal relationships and moderating factors and hence the depth of the analysis is limited.

Kamau and Waweru (2023) furthered this research question by investigating the role of governance policies in the effectiveness of women leaders in Kenyan SACCOs via regression analysis. Their results indicate that the presence of formal policies that encourage gender inclusion does not mean that they will work unless there are conducive organizational cultures. Policies in situations where cultural norms continue to be exclusionary will end up creating symbolic representation and not substantive influence in leadership. Inferential statistics used in the study contribute to the rigor of the study, but the study does not directly involve cultural variables in its model of analysis, which makes it less capable of explaining the results of leadership.

Mwangi and Kihara (2022) concentrated on the leadership development practices in SACCOs, using a mixed-methods approach to investigate the role of training and mentorship on leadership results. They have found that although leadership development programmes enhance the skills and confidence of women, their impact is mediated by the organization culture. Women leaders in settings with inclusive cultures are more inclined to use the acquired skills in a productive manner, and in restrictive cultures, the impact of leadership development efforts is minimal. Even though the research has presented useful information on the dynamics of culture and leadership development, it fails to focus on organizational culture as a driving factor, thus restricting its conceptual articulation.

Kibicho and Achieng (2024) also identified the effectiveness of mentorship and leadership in SACCOs through qualitative research, discovering that informal support systems effectively increase the leadership abilities of women. Nevertheless, the research paper also emphasizes that cultural resistance in organizations is usually a setback to such initiatives, which reaffirm the significance of linking formal support systems with culture change. Although the qualitative method is descriptive, quantitative validation is missing, which constrains the generalizability of the study.

In these empirical studies, some common patterns are apparent. To begin with, the organizational culture is a key determinant of the effectiveness of women in leadership, as it determines not only the availability of leadership positions but also the capacity to wield power and influence in the governance systems. Second, cooperative cultures with transparency and merit-based cultures are more effective in leadership because they increase legitimacy and participation. Third, hierarchically based exclusionary cultures or gendered norms of leadership limit leadership and even with formal policy and support structures. Fourth, organizational culture and institutional factors (policies, governance practices, and leadership development initiatives) are highly relevant to the outcome of leadership.

However, also the empirical literature shows significant limitations. A large part of the literature is based on cross-sectional design that does not allow making a causal inference and does not reflect the dynamism of organizational culture and leadership processes. Moreover, most studies look at organizational variables separately, and do not consider how they interact in a larger strategic context. Moreover, the use of sophisticated analytical methods, including Structural Equation Modeling, that can be used to analyze complex relationships between latent constructs is limited. Lastly, empirical studies in cooperative institutions, especially SACCOs in Kenya, are not so highly developed, and most of the studies are carried out in corporate or state sector organizations.

Based on these results, it is clear that, although the connection between organizational culture and the effectiveness of women leadership is already established, current research gives a partial picture of the connection between the two. The literature does not incorporate an analytical lens, which explores organizational culture as a strategic determinant of leadership effectiveness through the cooperative governance systems. The existence of this gap highlights the significance of a more integrated and context-sensitive analysis, which might reveal the multidimensionality and interactive character of organizational culture and the effectiveness of leadership, specifically in the context of SACCO institutions.

CONCLUSION

The review establishes that strategic organizational culture is a decisive factor in shaping women's leadership effectiveness. Across contexts, culture determines not only whether women access leadership positions, but whether they are able to exercise real influence, participate in decision-making, and contribute to organizational outcomes. Inclusive cultures promote legitimacy, trust, and participation, enabling women leaders to perform effectively. In

contrast, hierarchical and exclusionary cultures tend to reinforce informal power structures that limit authority and reduce the impact of women in leadership roles, even where formal representation exists.

A consistent pattern across the literature is that leadership effectiveness is not driven by a single factor but emerges from the interaction between culture, governance practices, institutional structures, and leadership development efforts. Nonetheless, much of the existing research treats these elements in isolation, resulting in fragmented explanations of leadership outcomes. This limits the ability to fully understand how organizational environments shape leadership effectiveness, particularly within cooperative institutions where governance is socially embedded and influenced by both formal and informal systems.

The review also highlights that empirical evidence remains heavily concentrated in corporate and public sector settings, with limited focus on cooperative organizations such as SACCOs. This is a significant gap, given the unique governance structures and community-based nature of these institutions. In addition, methodological limitations—especially the reliance on cross-sectional designs—restrict the ability to capture the dynamic and multidimensional nature of organizational culture and leadership effectiveness.

Overall, while the importance of organizational culture is widely acknowledged, the literature does not provide a sufficiently integrated and context-specific understanding of how it shapes women's leadership effectiveness within cooperative governance systems. This underscores the need for more focused and analytically robust research in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations should prioritize the deliberate development of inclusive and participatory cultures that support women's leadership effectiveness. This involves embedding values of fairness, transparency, and collaboration into everyday practices, ensuring that leadership opportunities are not only available but also supported by a culture that legitimizes women's participation in strategic roles.

Policy and regulatory frameworks should move beyond formal compliance requirements to actively promote cultural transformation within organizations. While gender-inclusive policies are necessary, their effectiveness depends on the extent to which they are supported by organizational norms and practices. Therefore, efforts to strengthen women's leadership should integrate both structural reforms and cultural change initiatives.

Leadership development programs should be aligned with organizational culture to ensure that skills acquired through training and mentorship can be effectively applied. Without a supportive environment, such initiatives may have limited impact. A coordinated approach that combines capacity building with efforts to address cultural barriers is therefore essential.

Future research should adopt more integrative and methodologically advanced approaches to better understand the complex relationship between organizational culture and leadership effectiveness. There is a particular need for context-specific studies focusing on cooperative institutions, especially within developing economies, to generate evidence that reflects the realities of these governance systems and supports more effective policy and organizational interventions.

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