

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION CAPABILITY AND PERFORMANCE OF WATER SERVICE PROVIDERS IN MOMBASA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of strategic communication capabilities on the performance of Water Service Providers (WSPs) in Mombasa County, Kenya. Grounded in the Resource based view, the research adopted a descriptive research design targeting management staff from seven institutions responsible for water service provision in Mombasa County. A census approach was employed, with the sample size comprising 167 respondents, including both upper and lower management levels across these institutions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, a pilot test was conducted with management staff from Kilifi-Mariakani Water and Sewerage Company and senior non-management staff at the Coast Water Works Development Agency (CWWDA). The pilot test confirmed the reliability of the questionnaire, with a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.7 for all variables, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Additionally, diagnostic tests confirmed the suitability of the data for regression analysis. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires, with analysis performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. The study employs both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to test the relationships between the identified strategic communication capabilities and WSP performance. The findings revealed that Strategic communication influenced the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County. The study, therefore, recommends that; there is need for clear communication between the organization and alliance partners to improve service delivery.

Key words: Strategic Communication Capabilities, Communication Tools, Frequency, Clarity, Timeliness

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic alliances have increasingly become essential components of organizational strategy in various sectors, driven by the need to overcome resource constraints, manage market dynamics, and leverage technological advancements for competitiveness. These alliances are critical for organizations that seek to capitalize on synergies by combining resources and competencies with other entities. Within the broader context of strategic management, alliance management is recognized as a core capability that organizations must develop to effectively navigate complex inter-organizational relationships and enhance overall performance (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2020).

Globally, strategic alliances have been embraced across diverse industries such as healthcare, technology, and utilities to foster innovation, optimize resources, and improve service delivery outcomes (Contractor & Lorange, 2021). In the technology sector, for instance, alliances between firms like Microsoft and Nokia highlight how companies can integrate hardware and software capabilities to deliver superior products to the market (Teece, 2018). Such partnerships are particularly advantageous in rapidly evolving industries, where the complexity of technological advancements and high capital demands necessitate collaboration (Dyer, Kale, & Singh, 2020).

In the water sector, managing strategic alliances poses unique challenges, particularly in regions characterized by scarce resources, fragmented markets, and diverse stakeholders. For example, in many developing countries, water service delivery is hampered by inadequate infrastructure, poor governance, and limited financial resources (World Water Development Report, 2022). Strategic alliances between public utilities, private companies, and non-governmental organizations have been increasingly adopted to address these challenges and improve service provision. However, the management of such alliances in the water sector is fraught with difficulties, including coordinating complex relationships between diverse actors, managing resource allocation, and ensuring compliance with regulatory frameworks (KPMG, 2021). Additionally, there is often a lack of trust between partners, particularly in PPPs, where private sector entities may prioritize profit

In the East African region, the water sector provides a pertinent example of the critical role of strategic alliances in addressing service delivery challenges. Water scarcity, coupled with inadequate infrastructure and governance issues, has made it difficult for governments to meet the growing demand for water services. In response, countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda have increasingly turned to strategic alliances to enhance water service delivery (UNDP, 2021). These alliances often involve partnerships between government agencies, private companies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), aiming to improve water infrastructure, management, and distribution.

The water sector in Kenya provides a compelling example of the challenges and opportunities associated with strategic alliance management in the public sector. Following the Water Act of 2002, which decentralized water service provision to local Water Service Providers (WSPs), the sector has relied heavily on strategic alliances to improve service delivery. These alliances, often formed between regional Water Services Boards (WSBs) and private entities, aim to enhance infrastructure development, resource management, and operational efficiency (WASREB, 2022). However, the sector continues to struggle with high levels of Non-Revenue Water (NRW), inadequate infrastructure, and governance issues, highlighting the need for stronger alliance management capabilities to address these challenges (Gakubia et al., 2021).

This study is centered on the Water Service Providers (WSPs) operating in Mombasa County, a critical urban hub in Kenya that grapples with significant challenges in water service delivery. The WSPs in this region operate under the oversight of the Coast Water Works Development Agency (CWWDA), a body responsible for ensuring the provision of sustainable and reliable water services across the coastal region. However, Mombasa County's unique socio-economic and environmental landscape presents numerous obstacles that complicate the effective delivery of water services.

Statement of the Problem

Water is a fundamental resource crucial to the socio-economic development of any nation. In Kenya, the government has made considerable efforts to enhance access to water services, recognizing its pivotal role in driving economic growth and improving the quality of life (Ministry of Water and Sanitation, 2020). Despite these efforts, the Water Services Sub-sector continues to face significant challenges that hinder its ability to meet the country's long-term developmental objectives. The primary issue lies in the inefficiencies within the service delivery framework, where Water Service Providers (WSPs) are struggling to meet established performance standards (WASREB, 2022). The strategic alliance framework, particularly through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) facilitated by the Water Services Boards (WSBs) and private entities, was introduced under the Water Act 2002 to improve the operational model of the sector. However, the effectiveness of these alliances remains questionable.

The conceptual gap lies in understanding how strategic alliance management capabilities, specifically strategic communication capabilities, can be leveraged to address these inefficiencies and enhance the performance of WSPs. Contextually, the problem is particularly acute in urban areas like Mombasa County, where the challenges of high population density, water scarcity, and aging infrastructure further complicate service delivery (Mumma, 2020). The research by Obonyo (2021) emphasizes that the water scarcity in coastal urban centers like Mombasa is exacerbated by outdated infrastructure and governance issues, necessitating more robust alliance management strategies.

Methodologically, there is a need for a comprehensive investigation into the specific management practices and capabilities that can significantly improve operational effectiveness and service quality within Kenya's water sector. Existing studies have largely focused on the structural and financial aspects of water service provision, with limited emphasis on the role of strategic alliance management in driving performance (Wang'ombe, 2019). This study sought to fill this gap by exploring the influence of strategic communication capabilities on the performance of WSPs, providing actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to enhance governance, regulatory compliance, and ultimately, service delivery in the water sector.

Objective of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of strategic communication capability on performance of Water Service Providers (WSPs) in Mombasa County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, developed by Barney (1991), posits that organizations achieve competitive advantage by leveraging their internal resources and capabilities, which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. This theory is particularly relevant to the study as it highlights the importance of strategic alliance management capabilities (SAMC) as key resources that can enhance the performance of WSPs in Mombasa County. According to the RBV, the ability of WSPs to effectively manage strategic alliances through communication, coordination, bonding, and innovation capabilities is a critical determinant of their operational success and service delivery quality (Barney, 1991).

In the context of this study, the RBV supports the research objective, which is to investigate the influence of strategic communication capability on enhancing the performance of WSPs. Effective communication within alliances allows WSPs to share knowledge, align goals, and coordinate activities more efficiently, thus improving their overall performance. Additionally, the RBV underpins the third research objective related to strategic bonding capability, as it emphasizes the value of building strong, trust-based relationships within alliances to achieve sustained competitive advantage (Wernerfelt, 1984).

Communication Capability

Communication capability in strategic alliances refers to the ability of alliance partners to effectively exchange information, share knowledge, and coordinate actions to achieve common objectives. Effective communication is critical to the success of strategic alliances, as it facilitates the alignment of goals, minimizes misunderstandings, and enhances coordination among partners (Chen & Tjosvold, 2008). In the context of WSPs in Mombasa County, communication capability is crucial for ensuring that all stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector partners, and local communities, are well-informed and engaged in the service delivery process.

Empirical studies have shown that communication is a key determinant of alliance success. For instance, Doz and Hamel (1998) emphasize that communication is essential throughout the life cycle of an alliance, as it helps manage partner expectations and reduces the risk of conflicts. Additionally, Dong and Glaister (2007) highlight that communication capability is particularly important in cross-cultural alliances, where differences in language, culture, and business practices can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. In the case of WSPs, effective communication can lead to better coordination of water resource management, timely responses to water-related issues, and improved customer satisfaction.

In this study, communication capability is operationalized as the ability of WSPs to maintain open, transparent, and effective communication channels with their alliance partners. This includes the frequency and clarity of communication, the use of communication tools and technologies, and the ability to share critical information in a timely manner. The impact of communication capability on the performance of WSPs will be measured through indicators such as the responsiveness to water service issues, customer feedback, and the efficiency of coordination among partners (Schreiner, Kale, & Corsten, 2009).

Conceptual Framework



Independent Variable

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Empirical Review

Strategic alliances have become increasingly important in addressing the challenges of water service delivery, especially in developing economies where infrastructure gaps, resource limitations, and technological constraints are prevalent. Globally, strategic alliances in the water sector often involve public-private partnerships, joint ventures, and community collaborations, with the goal of pooling resources, expertise, and capacities to achieve sustainable and equitable water service delivery (Schwartz et al., 2015). The literature underscores that the success of these alliances hinges on a core set of capabilities, among them, communication.

Communication Capability is consistently highlighted as a critical driver of alliance success. Mohr and Spekman (1994) assert that clear, timely, and frequent communication is essential for aligning objectives and coordinating activities among partners. However, barriers such as cultural and language differences, as well as the adoption of digital tools, can complicate communication within alliances (Ngugi, Johnsen, & Erdélyi, 2010). In the context of water service provision, effective communication is necessary to ensure that all

stakeholders are informed and engaged, particularly in addressing issues related to water scarcity, infrastructure management, and customer satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design.. This design was well-suited to exploring the impact of strategic communication capabilities on the performance of Water Service Providers (WSPs) in Mombasa County, as it allows for the collection of data that can be analyzed to identify patterns and relationships.

The target population consisted of the management staff at the Coast Water Works Development Agency (CWWDA) and three Water Service Providers (WSPs) in Mombasa County that hold Service Provision Agreements (SPAs) with the CWWDA.

The sampling frame includes the management staff of CWWDA and the three WSPs, which are the key organizations involved in water service provision in Mombasa County.

The sample size for this study includes management staff, lower-level managers, and other relevant staff who are indirectly involved in strategic alliance management at the Coast Water Works Development Agency (CWWDA) and its associated Water Service Providers (WSPs), specifically Mombasa Water Supply and Sanitation Co. Ltd (MOWASSCO), Tavevo Water & Sewerage Co. Ltd (TAVEVO), Kwale Water & Sewerage Water Co. Ltd (KWAWASCO), Kilifi-Mariakani Water and Sewerage Company (KIMAWASCO), Malindi Water & Sewerage Co. Ltd (MAWASCO), and Lamu Water and Sewerage Company (LAWASCO).

To ensure the robustness of the study, a census technique was employed. The total population, as per the updated sampling frame, consists of 167 individuals across the seven organizations.

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed specifically for this study.

For this study, the pilot test was conducted with a sample of 20 participants: 10 management staff from Kilifi-Mariakani Water and Sewerage Company (KIMAWASCO) and 10 senior non-management staff from the Coast Water Works Development Agency (CWWDA).

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the internal consistency of the items within the questionnaire.

The collected data was cleaned, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, was used to summarize the data and describe the characteristics of the sample

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

Table 1 shows the response rate of the questionnaires.

Table 1: Response Rate

No. of questionnaires Issued	No. of questionnaires Returned	Response Rate (%)
167	132	79

The high questionnaire response rate (79%) shown in Table 1 resulted from the method of administration of the instrument, which was in this case self-administered. This was acceptable according to Nardi (2018). This method also ensured that the respondents' queries concerning clarity were addressed at the point of data collection; however, caution was exercised so as not to introduce bias in the process. The other questionnaires were not returned by the respondents, hence, they were not included in the study.

Descriptive Analysis Results

This section presents the results of the descriptive statistical analyses of the data and their interpretations. The descriptive statistics helped to develop the basic features of the study and form the basis of virtually every quantitative analysis of the data.

Strategic communication capability on enhancing the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of strategic communication capability on enhancing the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya. This objective was determined by posing several statements related to: Frequency and clarity of communication, Use of communication tools and technologies, and Timeliness of information sharing. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate responses of this variable and it ranged from; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and was analysed based on the mean score and standard deviation. The closer the mean score on each item was to 5, the more the agreement concerning the statement. A score around 2.5 would indicate uncertainty while scores significantly below 2.5 would suggest disagreement regarding the statement posed. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Strategic communication	capability on enhancing the performance of water service pro-	viders
in Mombasa County, Kenya		

	SA	А	Ν	D	SD		Std.
Statement	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	Mean	Dev
Clear communication between our organization and alliance partners has improved service delivery.	21.4	37.2	17.1	21.4	2.9	3.53	0.712
Effective communication channels are maintained regularly with alliance partners.	10	42.9	27.1	18.6	1.4	3.76	0.955
Misunderstandings in our alliances are quickly resolved through open communication.	22.9	65.7	7.1	2.9	1.4	4.06	0.74
Communication tools and platforms are effectively utilized to enhance collaboration in the alliance.	10	42.9	27.1	18.6	1.4	3.71	0.955
Timely information sharing is a priority in our strategic alliances.	15.7	70	11.4	2.9	0	3.97	0.625
Feedback from alliance partners is actively sought and used to improve collaboration.	14.3	67.1	14.3	4.3	0	3.91	0.676
Aggregate score						3.832	0.777

The results in Table 2 shows that the aggregate M= 3.832; SD = 0.777 which is high and implies that there was considerable agreement among respondents on the influence of strategic communication capability on enhancing the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya. Respondents were of the view that clear communication between their organizations and alliance partners has improved service delivery (mean = 3.53). There were also indications that effective communication channels are maintained regularly with alliance partners (mean = 3.76). There was strong agreement that misunderstandings in the alliances are quickly resolved through open communication (mean = 4.06). Further, communication tools and platforms are effectively utilized by the WSPs to enhance collaboration in the alliance (mean = 3.71). In addition, timely information sharing was a priority in the strategic alliances (mean = 3.97). Respondents also indicated that feedback from alliance partners is actively sought and used to improve collaboration (mean = 3.91).

Performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya

The study also sought to examine the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya. This was the dependent variable was determined by posing several statements related to: Strategic Insight Contribution, Risk Mitigation Initiatives and Industry and Competitive Analysis. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate responses of this variable and it ranged from; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and was analysed based on the mean score and standard deviation. The closer the mean score on each item was to 5, the more the agreement concerning the statement. A score around 2.5 would indicate uncertainty while scores significantly below 2.5 would suggest disagreement regarding the statement posed. The findings are presented in Table 3.

	SA	А	Ν	D	SD		Std.
Statement	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	Mean	Dev
The overall efficiency of our water service delivery has	57	27.1	28.6	27.1	1 /	2.00	0.07
improved due to strategic alliances.	5.7	27.1	20.0	57.1	1.4	2.99	0.97
Customer satisfaction levels have increased since	2.0	40	27.1	20	0	2 76	0.911
forming strategic alliances.	2.9	40	57.1	20	0	5.20	0.011
The financial performance of our WSP has improved	21.4	21.4	2.0	27.0	171	2.07	0.712
through strategic alliances.	21.4	21.4	2.9	57.2	1/.1	5.07	0.712
The quality of water services provided has increased	20.2	22.0	21.2	171	05	2 20	0 874
due to partnerships with other organizations.	20.5	52.9	21.2	1/.1	0.5	5.59	0.074
Strategic alliances have helped us achieve key	57	596	142	157	57	2 27	0 792
performance targets set by the regulatory board.	5.7	38.0	14.5	13.7	5.7	5.57	0.785
The reliability of our water supply has improved as a	<u> </u>	21.2	105	12	06	2 50	0 671
result of strategic alliances.	28.0	51.5	16.3	15	8.0	5.38	0.071
Strategic alliances have contributed to the growth and	20	112	57	20 6	1 /	2 5 1	0.084
sustainability of our WSP.	20	44.3	5.7	20.0	1.4	5.54	0.964
Our ability to meet regulatory requirements has been	144	21.0	20.1	17.0	157	2.1	1 5 1 2
enhanced through strategic alliances.	14.4	51.9	20.1	17.9	13.7	5.1	1.312
The alliance has allowed us to expand our service	57	212	22.0	21 /	57	2 22	1.062
coverage in Mombasa County.	5.7	34.3	22.9	51.4	5.7	5.55	1.005
The overall reputation of our WSP has improved due to	12	51 /	21.4	20	2.0	2.24	0.006
successful strategic alliances	4.5	31.4	21.4	20	2.9	5.54	0.900
Aggregate score						3.267	0.929

The results in Table 3 shows that the aggregate M=3.267; SD=0.929 which is low and implies that there was low agreement among respondents on the performance status of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya. The findings shows that most respondents were uncertain on whether the overall efficiency of the water service delivery has improved due to strategic alliances (mean = 2.99). There was also low agreement among the respondents on whether customer satisfaction levels have increased since forming strategic alliances (mean = 3.26). Further, most respondents were uncertain on whether the financial performance of their WSP has improved through strategic alliances (mean = 3.07). However, most respondents agreed that the quality of water services provided has increased due to partnerships with other organizations (mean = 3.39). Respondents also agreed that strategic alliances have helped the WSPs to achieve key performance targets set by the regulatory board (mean = 3.37). There were also indications that the reliability of the water supply has improved as a result of strategic alliances (mean = 3.58), with most respondents indicating that strategic alliances have contributed to the growth and sustainability of the WSPs (mean = 3.54). The respondents were, however, uncertain on whether their ability to meet regulatory requirements has been enhanced through strategic alliances (mean = 3.1). However, the respondents were of the view that the alliances have allowed the WSPs to expand our service coverage in Mombasa County (mean = 3.33). There were also indications that the overall reputation of the WSPs has improved due to successful strategic alliances (mean = 3.34).

Inferential Analysis Results

Correlation Analysis

In this subsection a summary of the Pearson's product moment correlation analyses is presented. It seeks to also show the degree and strength of the association of the independent variable with the dependent variable. These results are summarized in Table 4.

		Communication Capability	Performance
Communication Capability	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	Ν	132	
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.217*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	
	Ν	132	132

Table 4: Summary of Correlations

The correlation findings in Table 4 show that there is a significant positive correlation between Strategic communication capability and the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County (r = 0.217, $p = 0.028 \le 0.05$). This indicates that Strategic communication capability by the allinance managers contributes positively to the performance of water service providers in the area. This finding aligns with previous studies by Rashidi and Peykar (2015), which highlight the importance of thorough situational analysis in enhancing strategic decision-making and competitive positioning .

Table 5: Linear Regression Results

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	В	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	5.34	1.757		3.0393	0.001
Communication Capability	0.259	0.108	0.212	2.3981	0.017

Based on the regression model estimated in Table 5, taking the independent variable (strategic communication capability) constant at zero, the performance of Water Service Providers in Mombasa County, Kenya would be 5.34. The results indicate that strategic communication capability significantly influenced the performance of Water Service Providers in Mombasa County ($\beta = 0.208$, p < 0.05). The results also show that taking all other factors at zero, a unit increase in strategic communication capability will lead to a 0.259 points increase in the performance of Water Service Providers in Mombasa County.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed that there is a significant positive realtionship between Strategic communication capability and the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County. There was considerable agreement among respondents on the influence of strategic communication capability on enhancing the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya. Respondents were of the view that clear communication between their organizations and alliance partners has improved service delivery. There were also indications that effective communication channels are maintained regularly with alliance partners. There was strong agreement that misunderstandings in the alliances are quickly resolved through open communication. Further, communication tools and platforms are effectively utilized by the WSPs to enhance collaboration in the alliance. In addition, timely information sharing was a priority in the strategic alliances. Respondents also indicated that feedback from alliance partners is actively sought and used to improve collaboration.

The study concluded that Strategic communication capability significantly influenced the performance of water service providers in Mombasa County. This implies that Strategic communication capability by the alliance managers contributes positively to the performance of water service providers in the area.

The study recommended that there is need for clear communication between the organization and alliance partners to improve service delivery. Also, there is need for the WSPs to utilize fully communication tools and platforms to enhance collaboration in the alliance.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study found that the model strategic communication capability (SAMC) as the independent variable could explains only a portion of the variations in performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya. Future studies should also need to examine other strategic management variables that contribute to performance of water service providers in Mombasa County, Kenya. Future studies could also use more indepth approaches like mixed designs.

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