

# Leadership Strategies and Their Influence on the Execution of Strategic Plans in Tanzania: A Case of NGOs in Kinondoni District

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## Abstract

This study aimed to assess leadership strategies and their perceived influence on strategic plans execution in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Tanzania with cases from Kinondoni District. It was grounded in Strategic Leadership Theory, complemented by Expectancy Theory and Goal-Oriented Communication Theory. The study used a mixed research approach. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select study respondents. Data were gathered from 52 participants, obtained using the Taro Yamane formula, representing Heads of Institutions, Heads of Departments and Managers. Survey and key informant interviews were the main methods for gathering primary data. Data was analysed using SPSS version 21. Study findings indicate that leaders drive the execution of strategic plans by providing strategic direction, fostering an enabling culture and motivating employees. However, most leaders do not spend adequate time on strategy to provide strategic guidance and oversight. Communication influences strategic execution by enhancing strategic clarity, reinforcing transparency, and improving collaboration. Incentive mechanisms influence execution outcomes by increasing employee motivation and commitment to strategic objectives. Furthermore, leadership skills promote strategic alignment, optimize resource allocation, and enhance team capacity. This study recommends that NGOs should institutionalize dedicated strategic oversight time, integrate execution metrics into leadership performance, establish structured strategic communication systems, implement a blended incentive framework linked to strategic milestones, and roll out execution-focused leadership development program. Future research should focus on quantifying the influence of different leadership strategies, comparative assessment of the influence of leadership strategies across NGO types and examining leadership strategies beyond those covered in this study.

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## Keywords

Leadership Strategies, Leadership Roles, Communication, Incentives, Leadership Skills, Leadership Values, Strategic Plans, NGOs, Kinondoni District

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## 1. Introduction

NGOs play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development agenda in the countries they operate (Abiddin, Ibrahim, & Abdul Aziz, 2022; Hashim et al., 2020). To ensure the realization of organizational strategic outcomes, NGOs prepare strategic plans to address complex challenges facing them, define shared vision, clarify and align strategic priorities, coordinate efforts and improve performance to achieve growth and sustainability (Daud, 2020; Munene & Nyaga, 2021; Leonard, 2024)

However, the rate of successfully executed strategies is comparatively lower, with higher rates of strategy failure amongst organizations of up to 90% (Choudhury, 2024; Cândido & Santos, 2019; Poulouse, 2024). Such comparatively lower success rates significantly undermine performance, growth and stability of an organization (Wann, 2022; Ntegamaherezo & Irechukwu, 2024).

Strategy failure is attributed to several factors as documented by strategy researchers and practitioners (e.g. Kgititso, 2023; Vigfússon et al., 2021; Poulouse, 2024). These factors include ineffective senior management team, inflexible organizational structures and processes, poor resource allocation, poor communication, lack of execution focus, unclear strategic intentions, toxic culture, inadequate alignment and coordination, and weak performance management.

There is a growing body of evidence (e.g. Tipurić, 2022; Takawira & Mutambara, 2023; Abdelwahab & Al-Sayed, 2024; Haule, 2024) that leadership plays a critical role on organizational strategic management comprising of defining strategic direction, providing strategic controls, developing and managing human capital, maintaining core competencies, nurturing enabling corporate culture, and promoting innovation and creativity. Leadership has significant influence on strategy execution through leadership commitment, communication, building enabling culture, developing organizational capabilities, coordination and monitoring and evaluation which translate to enhanced achievement of strategic results (Twum, 2021; Suharto, 2023).

As a lever of strategy execution, leaders play key roles across different phases of strategy execution phases by way of dedicating time for strategy oversight, enhancing the knowledge of employees, aligning strategic priorities, enabling inclusive participation, prioritizing allocation of resources for strategy execution and coordinating strategy execution (Doeleman et al., 2022; Gandrita & Raeda, 2023; Mvubu et al., 2025). However, in the absence of effective leadership strategies, leadership fails to translate strategy into concrete outcomes (Twum, 2021; Obuba, 2022).

Existing studies on strategy execution (e.g., Haule, 2024, Hendriks & Reddy,

2020; Mbogo, 2022; Njenga & Odollo, 2023) have predominantly investigated the role of strategic leadership or leadership styles within private and public sector settings, not explicitly in the context of strategic plan execution in the NGO setting which have unique stakeholder dynamics and governance mechanisms.

More recent studies focusing on NGO (e.g., Mbogo, 2022; Maturire & Irechukwu, 2023; Ayub, 2020; Leonard, 2024; Muthuka et al., 2024) have examined the influence of leadership styles and practices on strategic plan execution but were conducted outside Tanzania and did not adequately explore leadership strategies such as communication, incentives and leadership skills. Even studies that explored leadership strategies, some of them (Munene & Nyaga, 2021; Mohamed et al., 2025), most focused on organisational performance but not on strategic execution.

While strategy scholars and practitioners consistently emphasize the role of leadership in driving execution, there is a lack of empirical studies which have systematically examined how leadership strategies, particularly communication, incentives and leadership skills, influence the execution of NGO strategic plans in Kinondoni or Tanzania at large. In addition, validated metrics are lacking through which the influence of leadership actions, effective communication, incentive mechanisms and leadership skills on strategic plan execution can be evaluated within NGO contexts, therefore limiting comparative assessment across NGOs settings.

This gap presents a critical opportunity and need for localized, NGO-focused evidence which transcends leadership styles to evaluate how leaders apply strategies to mobilize and align resources and teams, allocate time for strategic oversight, incentivize engagement and performance and build execution capabilities.

Therefore, this study sets to address research gap by examining the perceived influence of leadership strategies, specifically incentive mechanisms and communication practices, on the strategic plan execution targeting NGOs located in Kinondoni, Tanzania, providing context-grounded insights which are currently missing in strategy execution studies and generate metrics for assessing leadership influence on strategic plan execution in the NGO setting.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Study Objectives

The general objective of the study was to assess how leadership strategies are perceived to influence the execution of strategic plans execution in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Tanzania, with cases from Kinondoni District.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- 1) To assess the role of leaders in driving the execution of NGO strategic plans.
- 2) To evaluate the influence of effective communication in the execution of strategic plans in NGOs.
- 3) To examine the effect of incentives on the execution of NGO strategic plans.
- 4) To analyze the impact of leadership skills on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What roles do leaders play in driving the execution of strategic plans in NGOs?
- 2) What is the influence of effective communication in the execution of strategic plans in NGOs?
- 3) What is the effect of incentives on the execution of NGO strategic plans?
- 4) What is the effect of leadership skills on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs?

## 2.2. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was delimited to assessing the perceived influence of leadership strategies on the execution of strategic plans within national and international NGOs operating for more than ten years in the environment, development, and health sectors in Kinondoni District, Tanzania. The study targeted respondents occupying three hierarchical positions namely Heads of Institutions, Heads of Departments, and Managers. Specifically, the study focused on assessing the roles that leaders play in driving strategic plan execution, evaluating the perceived influence of effective communication on strategic execution processes, examining the perceived effect of incentives on strategic execution, and analyzing the perceived impact of leadership skills on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs. The temporal boundary of the study was limited to the year 2024, corresponding to the period of data collection.

## 2.3. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study was confined to Tanzania targeting national and international NGOs focusing on conservation, development and health sectors, which restricts the applicability of its findings to NGOs outside these sectors and excludes local and sub-national NGOs with different operational contexts. The study's focus on strategic plan execution excluded leadership strategies deployed during strategy formulation, hence narrowing the scope of the broader strategy formulation-execution continuum. The study examined only leadership roles, effective communication, incentives, leadership skills and values—excluding other leadership and non-leadership factors that tend to influence strategic plan execution in NGOs.

Geographically, the study was confined to Kinondoni District, limiting generalizability to other districts or regions within and outside Tanzania. Methodologically, the use of survey questionnaires and key informant interviews may subject the findings to respondent bias and inaccuracies. Finally, the cross-sectional research design captured conditions at a single point in time, limiting the ability to accommodate evolving trends in leadership strategies within Tanzania's NGO sector.

To address the inherent limitations, the study deployed a comprehensive literature review covering the NGO, private and public sectors, as well as regional and international evidence. In this way, the theoretical and geographical relevance of the findings were projected beyond the Tanzanian NGO setting. The research mit-

igated social desirability bias by assuring respondents of confidentiality and encouraging honest responses. Additionally, adherence to the research roadmap and effective time management strategies supported the timely execution of all research phases.

## **2.4. Conceptual Definitions**

### **2.4.1. Strategic Plan**

Allison and Kaye (2011) describe a strategic plan as a document for communicating the organization's goals and the actions necessary to achieve those goals. This study defines a strategic plan as a document that defines the strategic vision, goals and objectives of an organization and the strategic interventions to be executed to realize the envisioned goals and objectives under the stewardship of effective leaders. Key elements of a strategic plan include a) vision b) mission statement c) critical success factors d) strategic objectives and actions, and e) implementation schedule (Biodun, 2019).

### **2.4.2. Leadership Strategies**

Leadership strategies are actions, approaches and plans used by organizations to achieve goals and guide teams to success (Reis, 2023). In the context of this study, leadership strategies refer to actions, tactics as well as plans and approaches applied to influence, engage and motivate employees in translating the strategic objectives of an organization into tangible results. This study will focus on two leadership strategies namely effective communication and incentives.

### **2.4.3. Leadership Roles**

Leadership roles refine to actions that leaders take to provide strategic direction, align resources, forge relationships and create enabling environment for individuals and teams to achieve organizational goals. These roles are enacted through communication, motivation, support, and strategic guidance (Northouse, 2016). Kotter (2012) describes leadership roles as comprising of actions by leaders aimed at providing strategic direction, forging a shared vision, aligning people towards the organisational vision, and inspiring people to overcome obstacles and achieve goals.

Moreover, Ireland & Hitt (2005) define leadership roles as the strategic responsibilities performed by leaders in terms of anticipating change, defining organizational culture, building human capabilities, enhancing competitive advantage and guiding long-term organizational strategic direction. Beer & Eisenstat (2000) describe leadership roles as actions involving the creation of open communication mechanisms, coordination of organizational units, clarification of strategic priorities, promoting accountability and addressing barriers to strategic plan implementation.

This study defines leadership roles as a set of actions performed by leaders to in setting the strategic direction of an organization, communicating a shared vision, ensuring strategic clarity and alignment and building enabling culture and inspiring others to achieve organizational priorities.

#### 2.4.4. Communication

Northouse (2016) defines communication as the interactive process whereby leaders exchange message with followers, provide feedback, listen to followers and build relationships to support the achievement of shared organizational goals. According to Clampitt (2016), communication is the deliberate exchange of information designed to clarify understanding, align expectations and priorities, and coordinate actions to achieve strategic objectives of an organization. Oetzel, Ting-Toomey & Rinderle (2006) define communication as both an intentional and strategic process whereby communicators design and tailor their messages to achieve specific organizational goals such as influencing, collaboration and sustaining organizational functionality.

In the context of this study, communication is the deliberate and strategic process in which leaders exchange information with others and clarify understanding to forge a shared vision and align priorities and actions to achieve strategic goals of an organization.

#### 2.4.5. Incentives

Robbins & Judge (2019) describe incentives as external factors and rewards which influence the willingness and behaviour of an individual to exert effort which is linked desirable outcomes that contribute to realization of organizational objectives. According to Kaplan & Norton (2001) incentives as rewards linked to performance that align individual and team behaviour with organisational strategic objectives by ensuring that individual and team actions directly contribute to successful strategic execution. On the other hand, incentives are defined as managerial tools deployed for reinforcing commitment to strategic priorities by rewarding behaviours and performance that align and drive the strategic priorities of an organization (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000).

This study defines incentives as rewards that are deployed to align individual and team behaviour with organisational objectives to reinforce commitment and drive performance on strategic priorities of the organization.

#### 2.4.6. Leadership Skills

According to Northouse (2016), leadership skills are defined as the ability to apply one's knowledge and competencies to accomplish specific organizational goals/objectives—such skills comprise of technical skills, human skills and conceptual skills. Also, leadership skills are defined as a set of abilities which enable leaders to streamline people, processes and structures to ensure effective execution of organizational strategy (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000). Likewise, leaderships skills are described as abilities of leaders to anticipate change, ensure strategic flexibility and to develop and manage strategic resources to sustain organizational competitiveness (Ireland & Hitt, 2005).

This study defines leadership skills as the abilities of leaders to apply their knowledge and competencies to influence people, ensure strategic alignment and build organizational capabilities to enhance strategic execution and realization of organizational objectives.

### 2.4.7. Leadership Values

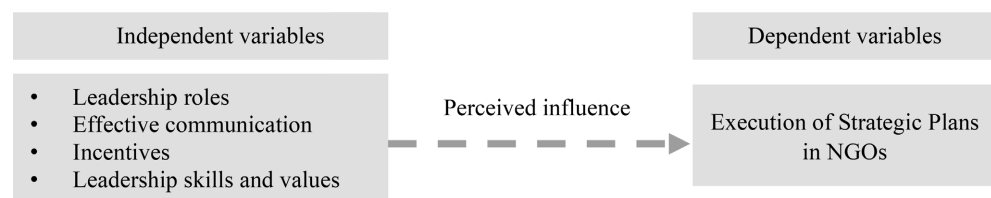
Kouzes & Posner (2017) describe leadership values as deeply held beliefs and principles that guide choices and behaviours of a leader and shape how a leader models ethical conduct, build trust and inspire followers towards shared goals.

According to Northouse (2016), leadership values comprise of moral principles and standards that leaders use to make decisions, influence others and establish an ethical environment within an organization. Schwartz (1992) defines leadership values as a set of fundamental beliefs which guide the leader's choices, decisions, actions and priorities, reflecting core dimensions such as integrity, fairness, responsibility and achievement.

Leadership values as a set of beliefs and principles that shape a leader's behaviours, choices and decisions in defining strategic priorities, fostering ethical culture, influencing and inspiring others to achieve shared goals within an organization.

## 2.5. Concept Framework

The conceptual framework (see **Figure 1**) for this study is underpinned by the assumption that leadership strategies influence the way NGOs execute their strategic plans. It is grounded on the Strategic Leadership Theory, complemented by the Expectancy Theory and Goal-Oriented Communication Theory, which collectively define how leadership actions, motivation mechanisms, and communication processes contribute to strategic execution.



Source: Author (2024).

**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of the study.

In this framework, independent variables comprise of leadership actions, effective communication, incentives, and leadership skills which are conceptualized as strategic leadership variables whose perceived influence drive strategic plan execution in NGOs. The variables are assessed not as causal factors but rather perceived by respondents as factors enabling or constraining the strategic execution processes. On the other hand, the execution of strategic plans, the dependent variable, is regarded as an outcome of leadership strategies in the NGO setting as perceived by respondents.

## 2.6. Study Area

The study was conducted in Kinondoni District in Dar es Salaam Region which has the highest concentration of NGOs in the region (NaCoNGO, 2020; Moshiro & Mgejwa, 2023). The study targeted national and international NGOs working on Environment, Development and Health sectors that have operated for 10 years

or more. This ensured that only organizations with established strategic planning and execution systems and proven execution experience are included. In this context, local, district, or sub-national levels NGOs were excluded to focus the study on institutions with established leadership hierarchies, existing strategic plans, and structured strategic execution mechanisms.

## 2.7. Research Methods

This study adopted a mixed research approach that combines quantitative descriptive design with qualitative inquiry to assess the influence of leadership strategies on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs. It adopted a descriptive research design. A case study design was adopted to study NGOs in Kinondoni District as a representative of other districts in Tanzania.

The population for this study was 60, with the sample size of 52 representatives determined using the Taro Yamane formula. The study used a non-probability purposive sampling which enabled the study to engage knowledgeable individuals and competent organizations with the operational maturity and leadership structures needed to provide reliable insights on leadership strategies and strategic plan execution in NGOs. Heads of Institutions, Heads of Departments and Managers were purposively selected as respondents because their roles involve direct responsibilities for strategic oversight, inspiring employees, managing teams, communicating to ensure strategic clarity and allocating resources for strategic plan execution (Narikae et al., 2017).

This study employed survey and key informant interviews and used a survey and interview guide respectively to gather primary data. Ten (10) key informant interviews were conducted. SPSS software (version 21) was used to analyse quantitative data. Thematic analysis was used to analysed data from key informant interviews. Cross tabulation was performed to establish relationships between the variables—leadership strategies and execution of strategic plans.

## 2.8. Reliability and Validity of Data

The reliability of instruments was measured using internal consistency. Internal reliability analysis demonstrated strong measurement consistency across constructs, with KR-20 values of 0.72 (leadership actions), 0.68 (communication), 0.85 (incentives), and 0.90 (leadership skills), which demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency. The data collection tools were piloted with 10 non-study respondents and expert input integrated to ensure clarity, relevance, usability and measurability of leadership constructs. Moreover, construct validity was improved through the alignment of all questions with the theoretical framework of the study.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 50 respondents participated in this study, whereby 30 respondents

(60%) were men, and 20 respondents (40%) were women. Regarding educational attainment of respondents, majority of respondents (74%) held a master's degree or higher, while 26% of respondents possessed a bachelor's degree. In terms of organizational position, 40% of respondents were Managers, 38% were Heads of Departments and 22% were Heads of Institutions. With respect to the nature of NGOs represented in the study, 58% were international organizations, while 42% operated at the national level. The sectoral focus of these NGOs was predominantly environmental (44%), whereas 34% and 22% focused on health and development respectively.

### 3.2. Roles of Leaders in the Execution of Strategic Plans

Quantitative results reveal that defining strategic direction (84%), fostering enabling culture (70%) and inspiring employee performance (62%) were perceived as central leadership actions for driving strategic plan execution in NGOs. As per **Table 1**, the perceptions varied across leadership positions, with Heads of Departments (94.7%) and Heads of Institutions (90.9%) showing the strongest agreement that defining strategic direction is a key leadership action for driving effective strategy execution. Moreover, fostering an enabling culture that drives performance was most prominently recognised by Heads of Institutions (90.9%) and Managers (70%). Inspiring employee performance more strongly acknowledged

**Table 1.** Leadership action for influencing strategy execution.

Leadership action for influencing strategy execution	Current position			
	Head of institution	Head of department	Manager	Total
Defining strategic direction	90.9% (10)	94.7% (18)	70% (14)	84% (42)
Building organizational capabilities	63.6% (7)	63.2% (12)	50% (10)	58% (29)
Fostering enabling culture that drives performance	90.9% (10)	57.9% (11)	70% (14)	70% (35)
Enacting enabling policies and systems	72.7% (8)	57.9% (11)	55% (11)	60% (30)
Inspiring employee performance	72.7% (8)	57.9% (11)	60% (12)	62% (31)

Source: Author (2024).

by Heads of Institutions (72.7%) compared with Managers (60%) and Heads of Departments (57.9%).

The above patterns are corroborated by qualitative insights from the key informant interviews. Specifically, eight out of ten interviewees emphasized that setting strategic direction, ensuring strategic clarity, and promoting alignment of priorities constitute the core leadership actions that drive effective strategy execution within NGOs.

Overall, the amount of time leaders spend on strategic work on a weekly basis is generally limited and to some extent absence. Only 8% of respondents spend 7+

hours as compared to 28% spending 4 - 6 hours and 26% spending 1 - 3 hours. Notably, 12% of respondents do dedicate any time on strategy in a typical week. These findings are reinforced by qualitative evidence from key informant interviews. Seven out of ten interviewees observed that strategic plans are not adequately implemented, mainly because leaders do not dedicate sufficient time to strategy execution oversight, which is a demonstration of limited leadership commitment to strategy.

Regarding metrics for measuring the influence of leadership on strategic plan execution in NGOs, 78% of respondents selected collaboration and partnerships as a key metric, followed by alignment of strategic priorities (72%) and employee engagement (70%). In contrast, a moderate proportion of respondents (56%) considered the achievement of strategic goals as a fundamental leadership metric for measuring leadership effectiveness in strategic plan execution. These findings imply that respondents conceptualise the influence of leadership on strategic execution through processes that facilitate strategy execution, rather than focusing exclusively on final performance outcomes.

### 3.3. Influence of Effective Communication on Execution of Strategic Plans

With respect to the frequency of leaders in communicating information about strategic plans to employees, only half respondents (50%) reported that senior leaders regularly communicate information about strategic plans. In contrast, 30% respondents indicated that such communication takes place occasionally, whereas 18% observed that leaders rarely disseminate information about strategic plans. These findings reflect significant inadequacy in communicating strategic plan information to employees by NGO leaders, which can lead to poor strategic clarity and alignment.

Overall results on the influence of effective communication on strategic plan execution in NGOs show that most respondents (74%) identified ensuring accountability as the major effect of communication. In addition, 68% of respondents pointed out improving strategy clarity, 66% highlighted promoting collaboration and 64% selected securing commitment to strategy as key influence pathways of the effect of communication on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs.

The influence of effective communication, as shown in **Table 2**, varied based on leadership positions of respondents. Ensuring accountability was identified as major influence by 81.8% of Heads of Institutions, 80% of Managers and 63.2% of Heads of Departments. On the other hand, improving strategy clarity was highlighted by 73.7% of Heads of Departments, 72.7% of Heads of Institutions and 60% of Managers. Promoting collaboration in strategy implementation was reported as key influence of communication by 81.8% of Heads of Institutions, 73.7% by Heads of Department and 50% of Managers. In contrast, a high proportion of Managers (70%) compared with Heads of Department (63.2%) and Heads of Institutions (54.5%) emphasized securing commitment to strategy as the influ-

ence of communication on the execution of strategic plans.

**Table 2.** Influence of communication on strategy execution across respondent positions.

Influence of communication on strategic plan execution	Current position			Total
	Head of institution	Head of department	Manager	
Improving strategy clarity	72.7% (8)	73.7% (14)	60% (12)	68% (34)
Promoting collaboration	81.8% (9)	73.7% (14)	50% (10)	66% (33)
Driving strategic performance	63.6% (7)	52.6% (10)	50% (10)	54% (26)
Securing commitment to strategy	54.5% (6)	63.2% (12)	70% (14)	64% (32)
Ensuring accountability	81.8% (9)	63.2% (12)	80% (16)	74% (37)

Source: Author (2024).

Key informant interview results show that eight out of ten interviewees acknowledged strategic clarity and transparency as key influences of effective communication on strategic plan execution. Additionally, six out of ten interviewees highlighted the role of effective communication in strengthening teamwork and collaboration for strategic plan execution in NGOs.

Among the metrics assessed, clarity of strategic plans was cited as a key metric for measuring the influence of effective communication on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs by 70% of respondents. Employee feedback on strategic plans and alignment of organizational priorities were identified by 68% and 66% as another set of metrics for measuring communication influence on strategic plan execution.

### 3.4. Effect of Incentives on Execution of Strategic Plans

With respect to the types of incentives applied to catalyse the execution of strategic plans, recognition and appreciation were selected by 90% of respondents as the most influential set of incentives. This was followed by fair compensation and benefits which was highlighted by 66% of respondents. Flexible work arrangements and career development opportunities were pointed out by moderate proportion of respondents, 54% and 52% respectively. These findings are supported by qualitative insights from the key informant interviews which showed that all interviewees (10/10) identified recognition and fair compensation, and seven out of ten interviewees cited fair compensation and benefits as commonly used incentives within NGOs.

In terms of the effect of incentives on the execution of strategic plans, a significant proportion of respondents (88%) acknowledged increased motivation and commitment as a major effect of incentives. Whereas improved performance of strategic objectives was highlighted by 62% of respondents, 56% of respondents cited strengthened collaboration and teamwork as the effect of incentives on strategic plan

execution. Qualitative insights corroborate the above findings. Increased employee motivation and improved performance of strategic objectives were both cited as effects of incentives on strategic plan execution by seven out of ten interviewees.

Disaggregated across leadership positions, results as per **Table 3** show that, increased motivation and commitment was cited as the effect of incentives on the execution of strategic plans by majority of respondents with 94.7% of Heads of Departments, 85% of Managers and 81.8% of Heads of Institutions. A comparatively high proportion of Heads of Institutions (72.7%) selected improved performance of strategic objectives as the effect of incentives compared with 65% of Managers and 52.6% of Heads of Departments.

**Table 3.** Effect of incentives on the execution of strategy based on positions of respondents.

Effect of incentives on strategic plan execution	Current position			Total
	Head of institution	Head of department	Manager	
Enhanced strategic alignment and focus	45.5% (5)	42.1% (8)	20% (4)	34% (17)
Increased motivation and commitment	81.8% (9)	94.7% (18)	85% (17)	88% (44)
Improved performance of strategic objectives	72.7% (8)	52.6% (10)	65% (13)	62% (31)
Enhanced innovation and creativity	72.7% (8)	47.4% (9)	45% (9)	52% (26)
Strengthened collaboration and teamwork	63.6% (7)	47.4% (9)	60% (12)	56% (28)

Source: Author (2024).

In the context of challenges for deploying effective incentive schemes that support the execution of strategic plans in NGOs, results show that 64% of respondents identified mis-link (misalignment) of staff incentives to strategic plan execution as the major weakness. Additionally, 58% of respondents observed unsustainability of incentive schemes as a challenge for implementing incentives. On the other hand, with respect to best practices for designing and implementing effective incentive schemes that drive strategic plan execution, majority of respondents cited aligning incentives with strategic objectives (76%), followed by continuous monitoring and evaluation of incentive effectiveness (72%) and ensuring incentives are valuable, fair and meaningful (64%).

### 3.5. Impact of Leadership Skills on Execution of Strategic Plans

The findings on leadership skills for driving strategic plan execution in NGOs reveal that effective communication is a critical leadership skill selected by the majority of respondents (80%), followed by strategic thinking (78%) and the ability to lead teams (76%). Similarly, leadership values that were perceived as instrumental in catalysing the execution of strategic plans are accountability (94%), integrity (84%) as well as commitment (76%) and transparency (72%).

Complementary insights from key informant interviews emphasize the need for leaders who possess execution-oriented skills and values. Strategic thinking was highlighted by nine out of ten interviewees as critical leadership skill, while seven out of ten interviewees recognised effective communication as an essential leadership skill for enabling and facilitating strategic plan execution in NGOs. Furthermore, a substantial number of interviewees pinpointed commitment (9/10), transparency (7/10) and accountability (6/10) as key leadership values that enhance the impact of leadership skills on the strategic plan execution in NGOs.

The findings on the impact of leadership skills on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs, according to **Table 4**, show that 80% of respondents cited strategic clarity and alignment, followed by enhanced employee capability (70%) and improved team performance (70%). Across respondent positions, 90.9% of Heads of Institution, 78.9% of Heads of Departments and 75% of Managers highlighted strategic clarity and alignment as the impact of leadership skills on strategic execution. A high proportion of Managers (85%) compared with Heads of Departments (63.2%) and Heads of Institutions (54.5%) recognised enhanced employee capability as an impact of leadership skill. Additionally, improved team performance was acknowledged as an impact of leadership skills on strategic plan execution by 81.8% of Heads of Institutions, 75% of Managers and 57.9% of Heads of Departments.

**Table 4.** Impact of leadership skills on strategic plan execution based on positions.

Impact of leadership skills on strategic plan execution	Current position			Total
	Head of institution	Head of department	Manager	
Enhanced strategic clarity and alignment	90.9% (10)	78.9% (15)	75% (15)	80% (40)
Efficient resource utilization	72.7% (8)	63.2% (12)	65% (13)	68% (34)
Enhanced employee capacity	54.5% (6)	63.2% (12)	85% (17)	70% (35)
Increased creativity and innovation	63.6% (7)	52.6% (10)	68% (13)	60% (30)
Improved team performance	81.8% (9)	57.9% (11)	75% (15)	70% (35)

Source: Author (2024).

Developing leadership skills is fundamental for enhancing the capacity of NGO leaders in driving effective strategic plan execution. Study findings highlight mentoring and coaching emerging leaders (86%), leadership development programs (80%) and providing opportunities to assume leadership roles (72%) as critical strategies for developing leadership skills. These strategies imply that NGOs need to institutionalise structured leadership development programmes to nurture execution-oriented leaders capable of translating strategic priorities into tangible strategic outcomes.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Roles of Leaders in the Execution of Strategic Plans

This study revealed three key leadership actions that drive successful execution of strategic plans in NGOs namely defining strategic direction and priorities, fostering enabling culture that drives performance, and inspiring employee performance. Others are building organizational capabilities and enacting enabling policies, procedures and systems.

The results of this study concur with other studies (Tipurić, 2022; Takawira & Mutambara, 2023; Abdelwahab & Al-Sayed, 2024; Haule, 2024) which concluded that the work of leadership involves setting direction, aligning resources (including human resources), defining roles and responsibilities, motivating and inspiring employees, and shaping organizational culture. The findings also confirm results by other scholars (e.g. Farhan, 2024; Mohamed & Frank, 2024) who found that to drive effective execution and ensure realization of strategic goals, leaders define a clear organizational vision, foster execution-enabling culture, align organization to strategic objectives, communicate clearly and strategically and inspire employees to strategy.

In terms of time spent on strategy, this study showed that most leaders spend between one (1) to six (6) hours per week. Kraaijenbrink (2023) observed that leaders should spend their time on strategy to ensure their organizations are future focused and on a forward trajectory. Researchers and practitioners have opined divergently on the amount of time spent or to be spent on strategy. Kraaijenbrink (2023) proposes “The One-Hour Rule” model based on differentiated roles on strategy whereby executives need to spend an hour daily, managers should dedicate an hour weekly while employees should use an hour monthly on strategy. This represents 12.5%, 2.5% and 0.6% of the time executives, managers and employees respectively spend on a 40-hour work week. An earlier study by Porter and Nohria (2018) investigating time management for CEOs observed that Executives do spend about 2 hours (21%) of their 9.7 hour-workday on strategy. On the other hand, four metrics for measuring the influence of leaders on successful execution of strategic plans were revealed by this study: collaboration and partnerships in strategic initiatives, alignment of strategic priorities and initiatives, employee engagement in strategy execution, and efficiency in resource utilization. These results are aligned with the metrics identified by Amoo et al. (2019) which include shared understanding of strategy, employee engagement, cross-functional collaboration, balancing resource allocation, execution enabling culture. Also, there is a strong commonality with leadership metrics by the Forbes Business Council (2022) which are good understanding and clarity of organizational vision, attainment of strategic objectives, alignment of activities, team commitment, growth and confidence.

### 4.2. Influence of Effective Communication on Execution of Strategic Plans

As per the results of this study, only half of leaders communicate about strategic

plans on a regular fashion. There is a strong alignment between the findings of this study and other studies. [Mohamed & Frank \(2024\)](#) argue that leaders are required to consistently communicate the strategic objectives organization wise to ensure effective execution of the strategic plan. In doing this, leaders should provide regular updates about the progress of the strategic plan execution.

This study shows that effective communication mainly influences strategic plan execution in four ways: improving strategy clarity and alignment, ensuring transparency and accountability on strategy execution, promoting teamwork and collaboration, and securing employee engagement and commitment. These findings are in sync with other similar studies ([Guuru & Adede, 2022](#); [Kimani, 2024](#); [Chirwa & Boikanyo, 2022](#)) observed that participatory, results-driven and multi-channel communication positively and significantly influences the successful execution of organisational strategy in NGOs through improved strategy clarity, employee engagement, teamwork and collaboration and accountability.

In terms of metrics for measuring the influence of communication in driving the execution of strategic plans, the results from this study reveal three key metrics: clarity of strategic plan, employee feedback on strategic plan and alignment of organizational resources and initiatives. These results are in harmony with the findings of other studies (e.g. [Ali, & Aldogher 2025](#), [Mapetere, 2021](#); [Chirwa & Boikanyo, 2022](#)) which concluded that effective communication results in improved strategy clarity, teamwork, coordination and alignment and high commitment to execute it.

### **4.3. Effect of Incentives on Execution of Strategic Plans**

The results from this study highlight two most important incentives deployed by NGOs being recognition and appreciation of employee performance and fair compensation and benefits. The above results support previous studies on incentives schemes. Available evidence from research and practice ([Zakayo et al., 2022](#); [Ajibade & Salako, 2021](#); [Mohamed et al., 2025](#); [Namono et al., 2023](#)) highlight a package of incentives for motivating employees for effective strategic plan execution such as rewards/gifts, recognition of employee achievement, job security, career advancement and work flexibility.

Regarding the effect of incentives on execution of strategic plans, this study reveals three key results: employees' increased motivation, engagement and commitment, improved performance of strategic plan objectives, and strengthened collaboration and teamwork. The above results confirm the findings of other studies ([Mbukwana & Ayandibu 2023](#); [Ibrahim & Abiddin, 2023](#)) showed that incentives are critical tools for directing employee focus on strategy, recognising and rewarding employee efforts and achievements leading to enhanced employee motivation and productivity, improved employee and organizational performance.

Results of this study on the best practices for designing and implementing incentives that support strategic plan execution in NGOs reveals three key best practices namely aligning incentives with strategic objectives, continuous monitoring

and evaluation of incentive effectiveness, and ensuring incentives are valuable, fair and meaningful. These results are aligned to some studies (Mihale-Wilson, 2024; Daniel, 2019; Ibrahim & Abiddin, 2023) which revealed that incentive schemes should demonstrate relevancy to employee's needs, effectiveness in achieving intended objectives, fairness and equity, and regular evaluation based on performance data and feedback.

#### 4.4. Impact of Leadership Skills on Execution of Strategic Plans

This study revealed four leadership skills critical for the execution of strategic plans in NGOs namely effective communication, strategic thinking, leading teams and mentoring and coaching. These results align with the findings by other studies (Kapur, 2020; Leonard, 2024; Munene & Nyaga, 2021; Morris, 2024) which identified effective communication, delegating, motivation, creativity, trustworthiness, and conflict management as leadership skills critical for effective functioning of an organization.

Results from this study on the effect of leadership skills on strategy execution in NGOs are providing strategic clarity and alignment, ensuring efficient resource utilization, improving team performance, and enhancing employee capacity. The findings of this study are aligned by observations made by other studies (Okumu & Litunya, 2024; Takawira & Mutambara, 2023; Lim et al., 2021) that found significant relationship between leadership skills, execution of strategy and organizational performance in terms of employee engagement and commitment, improved clarity and alignment, teamwork and collaboration, and improved execution.

Priority strategies for developing leadership skills as revealed by this study include mentoring and coaching, leadership development programmes and providing opportunities for leadership roles to potential/emerging leaders. The above results concur with several studies (Naoum, 2024; Morris, 2024; Ikendi & Retallick, 2025) which found that leadership development programs, tailored training programme, coaching and mentoring, and cross-collaboration are key strategies for leadership development.

## 5. Conclusion, Theoretical Implications and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusion

This study was conducted in Kinondoni District, Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania, targeting NGOs in the Environment, Development and Health sector. It set out to assess the influence of leadership strategies on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs in Tanzania. It revealed that leaders drive strategic plan execution in NGOs by setting strategic direction, fostering enabling culture, inspiring employee performance. Collaboration and partnerships, alignment of strategic priorities, employee engagement and efficiency in resource utilization were identified as key metrics for measuring the influence of leaders on strategic plan execution in NGOs.

Also, the study found that effective communication influences strategic plan execution by ensuring strategic clarity, enhancing accountability on strategy execution, and promoting teamwork and collaboration. It generated metrics for measuring the impact of communication on strategic plan execution in NGO comprising of clarity of strategic plan, employee feedback on strategic plan and alignment of organizational initiatives and resources.

NGOs can enhance strategic plan execution by increasing individual and team motivation, improving performance of strategic plan objectives, and strengthen teamwork and collaboration through the deployment of a suite of incentives. The study established best practices for incentives in motivating the execution of strategic plans namely aligning incentives with strategic objectives, continuous monitoring and evaluation of incentive effectiveness, and ensuring incentives are valuable, fair and meaningful.

Moreover, this study emphasizes specific leadership skills required for effective strategy execution namely effective communication, strategic thinking, leading teams, and mentoring/coaching. These skills help leaders in providing strategic clarity and alignment, ensuring efficient resource utilization and improving team performance. Overall, the study has demonstrated that leadership-driven action, communication, incentives, and leadership competencies are critical drivers and enablers of strategic performance in NGOs.

## **5.2. Implications**

### **5.2.1. Theoretical Implications**

1) The study reinforces Strategic Leadership Theory by demonstrating that strategic leadership in NGOs is an execution-oriented function, not just a planning role. It further demonstrates that effective strategic execution in NGOs is dependent on leadership-driven system alignment, cross-functional communication, and embedded motivation and accountability mechanisms.

2) The study redefines the conceptualisation of strategic communication as a core driver in strategic execution theory, which mediates leadership strategies and strategic execution effectiveness in NGOs.

3) It introduces a theoretical shift in how execution support systems are understood in non-profit leadership theory by framing incentives and leadership development not as just HR aspects, but as leadership tools that enable and drive effective strategic execution in NGOs.

### **5.2.2. Policy Implications**

1) NGOs need to enhance oversight and alignment of leadership actions with execution outcomes by redesigning their governance frameworks to incorporate execution accountability mechanisms to ensure leaders systematically report on progress against strategic objectives.

2) Institutionalizing strategic communication through policy guidelines mandating routine strategy updates during execution using approved communication channels to enhance clarity, alignment, transparency, accountability and cross-col-

laboration.

3) Embedding incentives within HR and performance management systems, linking incentives directly to execution-focused performance indicators to enhance motivation, improve performance and organizational commitment to strategic execution.

4) Institutionalizing development within NGO policies through structured leadership pipelines, mentorship frameworks and competency-based rewards linked to execution responsibilities to ensure leadership development is systematic, sustainable and execution focused.

### 5.3. Recommendations

The following are key recommendations of this study regarding the influence of leadership strategies on the execution of strategic plans in NGOs:

1) NGO leaders should institutionalize dedicated strategic oversight time to ensure strategy remains a central responsibility and mainstream execution-oriented metrics into leadership performance reviews to ensure effective alignment, commitment and accountability in strategy execution.

2) NGOs should establish structured strategic communication frameworks embedded with feedback loops to enhance clarity, transparency, strategic alignment and teamwork.

3) NGOs should operationalise sustainable and blended incentive frameworks directly linked to strategic performance, combining recognition, fair benefits, and growth opportunities to sustain motivation and execution performance.

4) NGOs should roll out an execution-focused leadership development pathway that integrates mentorship, tailored training, and value-based leadership practices to build capabilities and enhance performance on strategic plan execution.

## 6. Contribution to Knowledge

This study enriches knowledge on how leadership strategies affect strategy execution in NGOs:

1) Offers context-specific strategic execution assessment framework based on metrics for measuring influence/effect of leadership, communication and incentives generated by this study.

2) Extends Strategic Leadership Theory by demonstrating that execution impact depends on leaders' operational time commitment and value-based actions, in addition to vision and direction-setting.

3) Provides NGOs with a locally relevant set of execution metrics that leaders, Boards and donors can apply to monitor and evaluate leadership influence, communication effectiveness, and incentive alignment.

## 7. Areas for Future Research

This study has offered critical insights into the role of leadership strategies in shaping strategic plan execution in NGOs; however, further research is required to ad-

vance understanding in this area. First, empirical evaluation of the relative magnitude of influence of various leadership strategies on strategy execution would enable a more evidence-based selection of effective strategies within NGO contexts. Second, a comparative assessment is required to examine how leadership strategies influence strategic plan execution across different NGO categories (local, national, international), organizational sizes (small, medium, large), and respondent profiles (leaders versus non-leaders). Third, examining leadership strategies beyond those addressed in this study, recognizing that a range of leadership strategies exist and these exert significant influence on strategic execution processes.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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