

Strategic Leadership Competency and Public Organizational Performance: The Mediating Role of Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract

In today's complex and dynamic public sector environment, characterized by rapid technological changes and increasing demands for quality services, achieving effective organizational performance remains a significant challenge. The study plans to examine how strategic leadership competency influences public organizational performance in Oromia Regional State public organizations, highlighting the mediating role of organizational citizenship behavior. Quantitative research approach with an explanatory design was utilized. Cluster sampling was applied to select 18 public organizations from five clusters and simple random sampling was used to select 329 participants. Data was collected through structured questionnaire and analyzed by using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The finding demonstrated that strategic leadership competency positively and significantly influences public organizational performance. Additionally, the study confirmed that strategic leadership competency has significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior. In turn, organizational citizenship behavior exerts statistically positive and significant influence on public organizational performance. The study provides novel insights to fill an important literature gap by explaining how strategic leadership competency enhances public organizational performance and by revealing the mediating role of organizational citizenship behavior. The study provides theoretical contributions by adding dynamic insight in to the integration of Resource based view and Social Exchange Theory in understanding the relation among strategic leadership competency, organizational citizenship behavior and public organizational performance from Oromia Regional state public organizations perspective. Practically, the study provides recommendations to Oromia Regional State policy makers, organizations and leaders to design and implement strategies for strategic leadership development and integration of strategic leadership competency, organizational into public organizational performance initiatives.

Keywords

Organizational citizenship behavior, Oromia Regional State, public organizational performance, Resource Based View, Social Exchange Theory, Strategic leadership competency

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Introduction

In today's fast-changing technologies in public organizations environments, with ever increasing demands from citizens, financial constraints and intricate governance challenges, enhancing public organizational performance is a strategic priority for governments across the globe (Zhu et al., 2024). Effective performance of public organizations allows organizations to use public resources effectively to provide services; build public trust in public institutions; make public organizations more effective and more accountable; and help to speed up development (OECD, 2023).

While improved public organizational performance is associated with higher efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and quality public services delivery, the institutional capacity of public organizations, managerial skills of their managers and the governance challenges continue to be weak in many developing countries (Ohemeng, 2009). Insignificant public organizations' performance cause poor quality and ineffectiveness public service delivery, contributes to the wasteful use of public resources and diminishes public confidence. It also reduces employee commitment, makes administration less efficient and prone to corruption and hinders policy implementation (OECD, 2023).

In Ethiopia, the national and regional governments have been exerting efforts to improve public organizational performance particularly improving public service delivery through formulating and implementing public service reforms. However, studies reported that many public organizations continue to experience weak organizational performance characterized by poor service delivery, ineffective change management, weak organizational culture, limited implementation of reform programs, inefficient resource utilization, and deficiencies in performance management (Engida et al., 2026; Geta et al., 2024).

Similarly, in Oromia Regional State studies have reported challenges of public organizational performance which are expressed through weaknesses in translating reform initiatives into measurable organizational outcomes, limited result-oriented performance practices, coordination problems, and institutional capacity constraints that hinder effective public service provision (Daba, 2020; Geru, 2020). Such recurring performance issues influences the effectiveness of organizations, and hinder public institutions from fulfilling citizens' expectations and achieving their strategic goals (Castelo & Gomes, 2024).

Previous studies underscore the significant contribution of strategic leadership competency in helping organizations to achieve their strategic objectives (Abadama & Zelalem, 2023; Gomes, 2024). Studies also established significant influence of strategic leadership competencies such as visioning, strategic thinking, change management, strategic decision making, talent management and innovative thinking on organizational performance (Logan, 2024; Singh et al., 2023).

In similar way, prior studies have also showed statistically significant relation between organizational citizenship behavior on public organizational performance (Ansong et al., 2024; Gede & Huluka, 2024). Particularly in public organizations where employee's cooperation accountability and commitment are necessary for effective and efficient as well as meeting citizens' expectations organizational citizenship behavior plays an essential role in achieving these strategic objectives (Tremblay, 2024).

Though, studies by Haule & Mushi (2024); Nleya & Chummun (2022) established direct link between organizational performance and strategic leadership competency and organizational citizenship and performance, studies that integrate the combined influence strategic leadership competency and organizational citizenship behavior into public organizational performance are scarce, particularly in Ethiopian and Oromia Regional State public organizations. This situation suggests the need to examine the combined effect of strategic leadership competency and organizational citizenship behavior on public organizational performance from Oromia Regional State public organizations context.

Furthermore, in investigating the relation between strategic leadership competency and organizational performance, prior study draws small sample size (120 samples) (Mistarihi, 2021). Some study depends on single organizations and employed qualitative approach (interview) (Takawira et al., 2023). These methodological gaps suggest the studies are restricted from showing strong statistical significance (cause reduction statistical power), making it difficult to detect true effects and generalizability.

Additionally, previous studies focused on private organizations and developed nations' organizational context to investigate the relation between these variables (de Geus et al., 2020; Takawira et al., 2023). This contextual evidence suggests the need for investigating effects of strategic leadership competency on public organizational performance within respect to Oromia Regional State public organizations.

Moreover, in investigating the relation among strategic leadership competency, organizational citizenship behavior, prior studies depend on theories such as transformational leadership theory, Leader–Member Exchange Theory and other theories as theoretical foundation to understand the relation among these variables (Tekleab & Chiaburu, 2011). This evidence indicates that these theories provide limited explanation of how strategic leadership competency influence public organizational performance through organizational citizenship behavior. Thus, the aforementioned evidence suggests further empirical study to fill these gaps.

There is theoretical and empirical basis for the selection of OCB as mediator in this study. Resource Based View (RBV) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) have suggested that strategic leadership competency increases the performance of an organization by creating positive employee behaviors, such as OCB (Banks et al., 2014; Barney et al., 2021). Empirical studies also validate the link between leadership competency and organizational performance through OCB (Mostafa & Leon-Cazares, 2016).

Based on this, the study proposes to investigate the influence of strategic leadership competency (SLC) on public organization performance and OCB, and to assess the effect of OCB on public organizational performance; and determine the mediation role of OCB between SLC and POP in public organizations of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia.

Review Literature

Organizational Performance

Organizational performance can be considered as multidimensional that quantify the degree to which organizations accomplish strategic objectives (Aguilera et al., 2024). Previous research primarily focused on efficiency and effectiveness to conceptualize organizational performance (De Waele et al., 2021; George et al., 2019). While studies revealed that there are also behavioral, operational and stakeholder outcomes of efficiency and effectiveness such as internal satisfaction, innovation, adaptability, sustainability and others (Dh; Drago et al., 2023). This broader viewpoint is particularly helpful in public service settings where performance may not just include profit and loss, but also quality of service, accountability and value to the stakeholders (Andersen et al., 2021).

Despite of this agreement, the literature is split on what the most suitable measurements of organizational performance should be. Accordingly, traditional public management research stresses on the ability of public organizations to be effective and efficient in using resources wisely, and achieving policy outcomes (Van Dooren et al., 2015). However, modern researches on organizational effectiveness state that this is not sufficient, and the future success of the organization should be based on the attitude of the employees, organizational learning, organizational teamwork, innovation and satisfaction of the stakeholders (Grohnert et al., 2022).

In public organizational performance researches common indicator effectiveness depends on dimensions such as effectiveness, transparency, responsiveness, equity and the creation of public value (Netra et al., 2022). Similarly, empirical evidences indicate a combination of performance measurement which include efficiency and effectiveness and internal customer satisfaction measures instead of just one of them (De Waele et al., 2021; Tung et al., 2011).

In this framework, efficiency is defined as appropriate use of financial, human and technological resources (Manzoor, 2014). While effectiveness is defined as achieving organizations' objectives and expected public outcomes (Tung et al., 2011). In contemporary research, internal customer satisfaction is also regarded as a critical performance measure as satisfied employees are more committed, cooperative, and have higher discretionary effort, which in turn contributes to enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Sharma et al., 2016). These views led to the development of a conceptual model of public organizational performance, which is conceptualized as a combined performance efficiency—effectiveness—customer satisfaction within the organization dimension (Parhizgari, 2004).

Strategic Leadership Competency

Strategic leadership competency viewed as a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors that qualify leaders in driving organizations to effective performance in a dynamic and uncertain environment (Kebede et al., 2024). However, there is a difference of opinion among researchers with regards to the sets or dimensions of competency that help strategic leadership to be successful. Thus, strategic thinking, strategic planning and strategic decision making have been cited as the key components of achieving sustainable performance (George et al., 2019). Others highlighted

the strategic leadership skills of adaptability and resilience, including innovation, business intelligence, value creation, and dynamic capabilities as the means to a sustainable performance (Sarwar et al., 2024).

However, based on empirical research in the field of strategic leadership competency, the current study operationalized strategic leadership competency in to six dimensions namely visioning, strategic thinking, planned change management, talent management and innovative thinking (Gupta et al., 2018; Norzailan et al., 2016; Sirmon et al., 2007).

Visioning is the skill of formulating vision and communicating as well as building commitment of stakeholders for effective implementation (Kantabutra, 2024). While, strategic thinking involves analyzing what is going on inside the organization, what is going on outside the organization, and what lies ahead in terms of opportunities and threats, then determining strategic solutions to meet long-term organizational needs (Liedtka, 1998).

Additionally, this study conceptualized change management as a leader's capacity to plan, implement and institutionalize change in an organization without resistance to change and keeping the organization stable (Burnes, 2004). In the same way, talent management is defined as a structured approach to recruiting, turning those who are recruited into skilled employees and maintaining their dedication to the organization (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Furthermore, strategic decision-making is defined as the skill of thinking strategically, making timely decisions based on available information in the face of uncertainty, and matching decisions with long-term organization objectives (Leiblein et al., 2018). Moreover, innovative thinking is the capacity of a leader to think creatively, encourage experimentation and drive continuous innovation to support and tackle an organization's challenges and enhance performance (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCB is conceptualized as an employee's behavior that goes above and beyond assigned responsibility for betterment of their organization (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Recent studies demarcated that OCB as the individual's willingness to put forth extra effort for the organization, commit to the organization, take part in civic activities, be conscientious, and express opinions beyond contractual commitments, which are related to organizational learning and sustainability (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Kim, 2023).

Although, OCB is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct, the current study conceptualized organizational citizenship behavior as three related dimensions: organizational involvement, dutifulness, interpersonal relationship. The dimensions are considered as influential framework for the current study (Olowookere & Adejuwon, 2015).

Theoretical Review

The current study proposes Resource Based View (RBV) and the Social Exchange Theory (SET) as theoretical foundation for this study. Accordingly, Resource-Based View (RBV) suggests that firms achieve and maintain a competitive advantage by acquiring and utilizing resources and

capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable and not substitutable (Barney et al., 2021). Strategic leadership competency in the public sector is considered as an intangible resource that enables organizations to achieve superior performance (Barney et al., 2021; Bryson et al., 2010).

Social Exchange Theory (SET) suggests that positive discretionary behaviors on the part of employees follow supportive and behaviors which go beyond what is required for the job (Podsakoff et al., 2000). SET argues that the strategic organizational capability is directly reflected in the reciprocal citizenship behaviors of employees (Sirmon et al., 2007). Competent strategic leaders foster high-quality social exchange relationships, encouraging employees to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors such as organizational involvement, dutifulness and build interpersonal relation thereby actively supporting achievement of organizational goals (Nleya & Chummun, 2022).

Subsequently, the integration of RBV and SET in single frame work to investigate the influence of strategic leadership competency on public organizational performance and the mediating role of organizational citizenship behavior may provide strong theoretical background to generate insights and empirical findings to bridge the gaps in literature. For this reason, RBV offers a theoretical explanation how strategic leadership competency influence public organizational performance and organizational citizenship behavior. While, SET offers theoretical background on how behavioral process might be translated into high performance in the organization, thereby OCB serves as a conductor through which strategic leadership exert influence on public organizational performance.

Hypotheses Development

Strategic Leadership Competency and Public Organizational Performance

Literature have consistently demonstrated the link between SLC and POP, demonstrating that organizations led by strategically competent leaders are better able to formulate and implement strategies that help to achieve superior performance. Therefore, effective, efficient and meeting internal customer expectation in public organizations rely on competent strategic leadership in public organizations (Ireland & Hitt, 1999; Serfontein & Hough, 2011).

Furthermore, several studies confirmed significant influence of SLC and POP. Accordingly, strategic leadership competencies such as ability to develop and share a vision, strategic thinking, strategic decision-making skill, well-designed change management approaches, talent management significantly contribute to high organizational performance (Logan, 2024; Patrick & Lu, 2025).

However, this evidence is not completely consistent among studies. Hence, studies reported insignificant effects of strategic leadership competency on organizational performance (Sri Bintari et al., 2023; Strugar Jelača et al., 2022). This inconsistency suggests further study to examine the relation between SLC on POP.

Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a theoretical foundation to examine the relation between strategic leadership competency and organizational performance. Accordingly, RBV posits that

organizations achieve superior performance by possessing and effectively deploying strategic leadership resources and capabilities (Barney et al., 2021). From this perspective, strategic leadership competency constitutes as an intangible resource that enables organizations to achieve superior performance.

H1: SLC has significant effect on POP

Strategic Leadership Competency and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Literature supports the direct link between strategic leadership competency and OCB (Nleya & Chummun, 2022; Shifare et al., 2021). Thus, competent strategic leaders create relational and motivational conditions that encourage employees to exceed formal role requirements, thereby strengthening organizational long-term performance. In other words, leaders who demonstrate competency support OCB (Abdullahi et al., 2020).

Additionally, studies support the direct relation between SLC and organizational citizenship behavior. For example, Demissie et al. (2024), demonstrated that leadership competencies related to strategic thinking, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive capacity significantly influence employees' willingness to involve in organizational involvement, dutifulness and interpersonal. Furthermore, Nleya & Chummun (2022) showed that strategic leadership capabilities have direct relation with organizational citizenship behaviors.

In addition, Social Exchange Theory suggests that leaders who are strategically competent develop reciprocal exchange relationships with their employees through their fairness, their ability to communicate a strategic vision, their empowerment of employees, their constant support of them, and their investment in their professional growth. Such leader behaviors help to create trust, obligation and commitment amongst employees and encourage them to return the favor through discretionary behaviors. These behaviors, in turn, foster better collaboration, increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization, and ultimately lead to better performance of the organization. (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

H2: SLC has significant effect on OCB

Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Public Organizational Performance

The extant literature consistently indicated that OCB has a direct link with organizational performance across diverse organizational contexts (Organ, 2026; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Furthermore, studies confirmed that OCB serve as one of a crucial factor that improves organizational effectiveness (Nielsen et al., 2009; Organ, 2026). However, there are mixed findings on the influence of OCB and organizational performance. Accordingly, some studies reported that excessive OCB may not improve organizational performance and can even reduce effectiveness by increasing employee role overload, stress, and burnout, thereby diminishing productivity (Bergeron, 2007; Bolino et al., 2013).

According to SET, employees tend to return to an organization what it gives them in the form of OCB. These voluntary behaviors contribute to collaboration, efficiency and effectiveness in the

organization, which subsequently leads to higher public organizational performance and to a theoretical foundation for a positive OCB–performance relationship (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

H3: OCB has significant effect on POP

Mediation of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Empirical evidence suggest that leadership competencies affect public organizational performance both directly and indirectly by shaping employees' discretionary behaviors, particularly OCB, which strengthens organizational effectiveness and performance (Organ, 2026; Vigoda-Gadot & Beeri, 2012). Additionally, studies established the direct link between strategic leadership competency and public organizational performance through OCB (de Geus et al., 2020; Organ, 2026).

Nevertheless, existing empirical evidence remains inconclusive, as some studies have found that OCB insignificantly mediates the relationship between leadership competency and organizational performance because in public organizations with many layers of bureaucracy and little discretion in decision making, where political interference and the emphasis on rule adherence may hinder employees from engaging in discretionary behaviors (de Geus et al., 2020; Tai et al., 2012).

Furthermore, overproduction related to OCB can also cause role overload, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, which will ultimately affect the performance of the organization (Bergeron, 2007). These mixed findings indicate the need for further investigation to clarify the conditions under which OCB functions as an effective mediating mechanism between strategic leadership competency and public organizational performance. Moreover, Social Exchange Theory provides a theoretical explanation for the mediating role of OCB in the relationship between strategic leadership competency and public organizational performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Organ, 2026).

H4: OCB mediates the relation between SLC and POP.

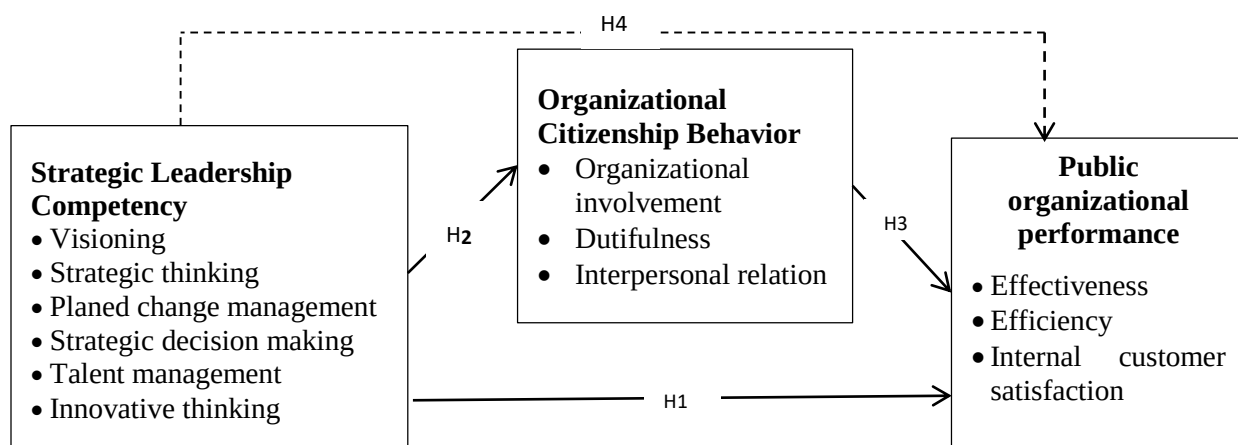


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study; dashes line represents indirect path

Methods and Materials

Study Area

The study area included public institutions of Oromia Regional State located in Addis Ababa in the sub-City of Kirkos in the locality known as Sarbet. These public organizations are comprising of 53 institutions responsible for providing public services to the local population and implement policies and strategies of government. According to public service and human resource bureau of Oromia Regional State these organizations are grouped into five cluster according to their functional mandates and administrative similarities.

These organizations located in Addis Ababa, Kirkoes municipality (specific area locally called Sarbet). They are responsible for implementing and overseeing policies, programs, and development initiatives related to overall development of the region, in accordance with the constitutional mandates of the regional and federal governments (Assefa, 2020; Terefe, 2016). The study explores how SLC affect POP and OCB mediate the relation between these variables in selected organizations.

Research Method

This study employs quantitative research approach with explanatory research design. This was because quantitative approach helps systematically examine relationships among variables through numerical measurement and statistical analysis. Quantitative research assist researchers to test theories, verify hypotheses, and determine the strength and direction of associations between independent and dependent variables using objective and replicable procedures. It also helps to emphasizes precision, generalizability, and the capacity to produce findings that can be statistically inferred to a broader population (Creswell, 2022).

On the other hand, explanatory research design helps to ascertain whether there is a nature cause and influence relationship between variables. It also allowed carrying out generalized research, reduction of bias results, and evaluation of numerical statistics (Creswell, 2022). It is essential in assisting the researcher to test theories underpinning this research in relation to Oromia public organizations. Moreover, this research design assisted the researcher to predict future “why” and “how” strategic leadership competency influences public organization performance directly and indirectly through organizational citizenship behavior.

Population and Sampling

Population of the study comprises of employees in public organizations within Oromia Regional state. We followed two steps to select samples. First, we select 18 public organizations from 53 organizations from each cluster by using probability sampling procedures to ensure all clusters were represented in the final sample. The selection was also based on maintaining proportionality. Second, following selection of 18 public organizations we have identified 2296 employees and

select samples from employees through simple random sampling. The sample size was determined by using Kothari (2004) finite population formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2(N-1) + z^2 \cdot p \cdot q} = \frac{1.96^2(0.5)(0.5)(2,296)}{0.05^2(2,296-1) + 1.96^2(0.5)(0.5)} = 329.$$

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from employees by using structured questionnaires. Two language experts followed the back translation method for translating the questionnaire from English into Afan Ormo. This was then pretested on 32 employees to check clarity, cultural appropriateness and language accuracy. Items were refined and made easier to understand and appropriate to the context of the respondents through feedback received from the pre-test. The next step is to clarify, or improve, items that are not clear or consistent. Data collection was done from March to May 2017 Ethiopian Calendar and 329 provided their response which made 96% response rate.

SEM-PLS version 4.1 software was used to analyze data. It was selected because it is appropriate for analyzing complex models with multiple latent constructs, direct and mediating relationships, and reflective measurement models Hair et al. (2017) . it helps to examine cause-effect relation between variables and provides robust results. It is also noteworthy for complex models with mediation analysis in a single integrated model. SEM-PLS helps researchers to statistically estimate measurement and the structural model (Henseler et al., 2015).

Moreover, the study aimed at predicting and explaining the relationship between complex latent constructs. Thus PLS-SEM was preferred over CB-SEM. PLS-SEM explains as much variance as possible, and it can be used for theory development, complex models with multiple indicators, mediation analysis, as well as hierarchical component models (Hair et al., 2017).

Measurement

Strategic leadership competency as a multi-dimensional construct with six dimensions, including visioning, strategic thinking, planned change management, and talent management, innovative thinking and strategic decision making (Gupta et al., 2018; Marijani, 2017; Norzailan et al., 2016). The assessment is based on 30 questionnaires with a Likert scale taken from previous studies (Bouckennooghe et al., 2009; Gupta et al., 2018; Witek-crabb et al., 2026).

The study used item parceling to simplify the model, increase the reliability and validity of the measurements, and handle large number of measurement items that might be involved, as well as to reduce the measurement error. The original indicators were aggregated into 6 parcels, leaving the representation of the construct the same but with a more parsimonious measurement model. In addition, the assessment was based on the employees' perception which gives valuable information on how SLC affects performance and overall organizational effectiveness.

To rigorously measure public organizational performance, the measures used in this study were a highly-validated multi-scale questionnaires developed from previous studies. The questionnaires with 15 questions and five-point Likert scale allowed for an extensive evaluation of the

effectiveness, efficiency and internal customer satisfaction of public organizations (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2015; Richard et al., 2009).

The instrument for assessing OCB was adapted from Olowookere and Adejuwon (2015). It captures employees' discretionary behaviors on three dimensions including organizational involvement, dutifulness, and interpersonal relations. It is comprised of 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) that provides a comprehensive measure of organizations citizenship behavior.

Common Method Bias (CMB)

Two methods were used to reduce common method bias and increase the credibility and validity of the results from the survey findings: procedural and statistical. The first is Harman's single factor test which showed that the common method variance was not a related problem as the first unrotated factor explained only 31.692% of the total variance, which is below the suggested limit of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

The other method is checking multicollinearity through variance inflation factors (VIF) and the result indicates the values for each variable were below the suggested threshold of 3.3 Hair et al. (2017) and thus common method bias (CMB) from multicollinearity was not a problem. The data used were, however, obtained from a single source with a cross-sectional design, which renders it not fully possible to exclude the existence of common method bias, and therefore with reservations the results can be interpreted.

Pilot Test

To pretest the questionnaire, make it clearer, reliable and suitable, a pilot study was conducted first, before the main data collection. The pilot survey included 44 respondents from employees in public organizations who were representative of the type of public organizations surveyed in the main study. The final sample excluded participants to retain the independence of the primary data sample. Several items in the questionnaire were revised in the light of the comments that were received, so as to improve the wording and sequence of items.

All the reliability analysis Cronbach's alpha for the constructs were found to be greater than the accepted value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that the internal consistency of the constructs is satisfactory with strategic leadership competency ($\alpha = 0.964$), public organizational performance ($\alpha = 0.821$), organizational citizenship behavior ($\alpha = 0.987$). The instrument was, therefore, deemed reliable and suitable for use in the main study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards set by Ethiopian Public Service University served as base to conduct this study. Accordingly, ethical practices such as considering participant dignity, anonymity, and informed consent strictly followed prior to and during data collection. Informed consent was obtained about the purpose of the study, and it included notice that participation was completely voluntary without

any risks involved, and confidentiality was guaranteed as no personal identifiers were included. Data collection instruments were also checked for free from cultural bias-free; academic integrity was maintained by honest reporting and proper acknowledgment of sources.

Result

Demographic Information of Respondents

As shown in table 1, demographic information of respondents illustrates that inclusion of a substantial proportion of female respondents (32.8%), ensures gender representation. Educational background of respondents indicates that the respondents have strong academic and professional capacity to understand the topic under investigation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the data collected. Regarding work experiences of respondents, majority of respondents were informed by individuals with substantial institutional knowledge and long-term exposure to public organizations operations and reforms. Finally, samples were drawn from strategic leaders in public organizations which include directors, team leaders and deputy heads in public organizations as a result the study captured perspectives from strategic leaders' levels.

To conclude, the demographic characteristics suggest that the data were obtained from competent, experienced, and strategically positioned respondents, making the study findings reliable and relevant for understanding the issue under investigation.

Table 1: Demographic information of Respondents

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	221	67.2
Female	108	32.8
Educational level		
Degree	97	29.5
MA/Msc	208	62.2
Phd	24	7.2
Work experience		
1-5 years	33	10
6-10 years	78	23.7
11-15 years	114	34.7
16-20 years	104	31.6
Leadership Position		
Directors	89	27
Team leaders	109	33.2
Experts	131	39.8

Assessment of Measurement Model

PLS-SEM was used to assess the reflective-reflective measurement model, which was conducted in two stages. First, the loadings of the indicators, internal consistency reliability and convergent validity were examined before testing the structural model. The values of all the indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha are greater than 0.70, indicating good reliability and internal consistency of the constructs (Hair et al., 2022) (see table 2).

However, three indicators (TMS2=0.649, EFF5=0.64 and IR=0.612) showed loadings slightly below 0.70. In social science researches, it is common to observe loading slightly below the threshold 0.70. Rather than automatically deleting such indicators, it is methodologically more appropriate to assess the influence of their exclusion on composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (Hair et al., 2022). In this case, three indicators reserved because their exclusion or presence did not produce any improvement in composite reliability and average variance extracted.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to examine the convergent validity, and all constructs were above the recommended value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). These findings validate the measurement items covering the latent constructs. Moreover, discriminant validity was tested by the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. As shown in Table 3, all constructs met the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as well as all HTMT values were lower than the recommended value of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). The results suggest that each construct is empirically separate from the others, which means each latent variable represents a different construct.

Table 2: First order measurement model assessment

Constructs	Item	Loading	VIF	α	CR	AVE
Visioning	VIS1	0.739	2.942	0.775	0.847	0.586
	VIS2	0.713	2.793			
	VIS3	0.751	2.964			
	VIS4	0.712	1.456			
	VIS5	0.711	2.196			
Strategic Thinking	STS1	0.743	2.18	0.856	0.997	0.636
	STS2	0.8	2.956			
	STS3	0.864	2.779			
	STS4	0.822	2.906			
	STS5	0.752	2.109			
Change management	CMS1	0.834	2.525	0.905	0.929	0.724
	CMS2	0.869	2.263			
	CMS3	0.861	2.265			
	CMS4	0.842	1.133			
	CMS5	0.849	2.852			
Strategic Decision Making	SDMS1	0.705	2.988	0.920	0.941	0.763
	SDMS2	0.904	2.31			
	SDMS3	0.933	2.889			
	SDMS4	0.925	2.726			
	SDMS5	0.881	2.379			

Talent management	TMS1	0.712	1.81	0.796	0.860	0.552
	TMS2	0.649	2.284			
	TMS3	0.819	2.0199			
	TMS4	0.783	2.273			
	TMS5	0.74	2.167			
Innovative thinking	IT1	0.72	2.69	0.841	0.887	0.613
	IT2	0.783	2.622			
	IT3	0.847	2.551			
	IT4	0.772	2.437			
	IT5	0.786	2.617			
Organizational Involvement	OI1	0.811	1.826	0.848	0.892	0.624
	OI2	0.793	1.542			
	OI3	0.761	1.574			
	OI4	0.788	1.574			
	OI5	0.796	1.779			
Dutifulness	DUT1	0.843	2.424	0.858	0.898	0.639
	DUT2	0.806	2.596			
	DUT3	0.785	2.56			
	DUT4	0.731	1.943			
	DUT5	0.829	1,013			
Interpersonal relation	IR1	0.612	1.633			
	IR2	0.72	1.445	0.749	0.858	0.550
	IR3	0.875	1.416			
	IR4	0.728	1.478			
	IR5	0.75	1.54			
Effectiveness	EFF1	0.852	2.728	0.898	0.925	0.714
	EFF2	0.914	2.198			
	EFF3	0.916	2.268			
	EFF4	0.872	2.473			
	EFF5	0.64	1.648			
Efficiency	EI1	0.788	2.634	0.906	0.930	0.727
	EI2	0.878	2.605			
	EI3	0.892	2.132			
	EI4	0.883	2.565			
	EI5	0.818	2.616			
Internal Customer Satisfaction	CS1	0.764	2.207			
	CS2	0.872	2.654	0.901	0.927	0.719
	CS3	0.923	2.286			
	CS4	0.869	2.383			
	CS5	0.803	2.537			

In the second stage, SLC, OCB and POP were modeled as second-order reflective-reflective hierarchical component models (HCM) using PLS-SEM. A two-stage approach was used, first estimating latent scores for the first-order constructs, and then using these scores to estimate the higher-order constructs. This approach will increase the accuracy of the estimates, decrease the complexity of the models, and decrease the effects of multicollinearity. The multidimensional constructs were validated and all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were lower than the recommended value of 3.3, suggesting that there were no multicollinearity issues (Hair et al., 2022).

Table3: First order constructs discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT)

	Alpha	CM	ICS	DUT	EFF	IR	IT	OI	SDMS	STS	TMS	VIS
EI	0.853	0.452	0.66	0.554	0.663	0.442	0.489	0.471	0.52	0.502	0.555	0.445
CM	0.493	0.851	0.533	0.485	0.423	0.313	0.708	0.498	0.615	0.6	0.692	0.675
ICS	0.731	0.587	0.848	0.592	0.619	0.443	0.571	0.543	0.558	0.499	0.56	0.525
DUT	0.624	0.546	0.669	0.8	0.46	0.557	0.475	0.646	0.482	0.444	0.419	0.464
EFF	0.722	0.452	0.683	0.518	0.845	0.42	0.465	0.395	0.416	0.485	0.528	0.384
IR	0.511	0.364	0.52	0.674	0.469	0.742	0.361	0.41	0.374	0.344	0.276	0.403
IT	0.555	0.81	0.655	0.557	0.519	0.432	0.783	0.503	0.645	0.679	0.677	0.669
OI	0.535	0.566	0.622	0.755	0.438	0.496	0.593	0.79	0.447	0.427	0.426	0.523
SDMS	0.568	0.667	0.609	0.534	0.444	0.431	0.723	0.501	0.874	0.676	0.616	0.625
STS	0.569	0.681	0.566	0.515	0.537	0.404	0.801	0.5	0.757	0.798	0.586	0.594
TMS	0.644	0.815	0.657	0.501	0.595	0.346	0.825	0.521	0.719	0.705	0.743	0.567
VIS	0.529	0.804	0.625	0.564	0.438	0.502	0.829	0.645	0.735	0.729	0.723	0.725

Note: VIS=visioning, CM=Change management, STS= Strategic Thinking Skill, SDMS= Strategic Decision-making skill, IT=Innovative thinking, TMS=Talent management, OI=Organizational involvement, DUT=Dutifulness, IR= Interpersonal relation, EFF=Effectiveness, Ei= Efficiency, ICS=customer satisfaction.

Note: the bold numbers on the left side represent the HTMT, while the non-bold values on the right side indicate the Fornell-Larcker Criterion value.

Moreover, loadings of the indicators were analyzed and all indicators have loaded above this consideration as suggested (0.70) (Hair et al., 2022). However, STS (0.667), CMS (0.680), SDMS (0.625) and IT (0.674) showed loading slightly below the recommended cutoff. But we preserved these indicators for further analysis as their presence doesn't affect AVE (Hair et al., 2017). Additionally, the values of a Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability are over 0.70, which signifies acceptable reliability. This finding is empirical evidence of the fact that measurement items used have sufficient internal consistency, and the constructs used in the model have acceptable reliability.

Besides, the second-order construct was checked for discriminant validity based on the HTMT, Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross loading values. Accordingly, the values of HTMT found to be below 0.85 indicated satisfactory discriminant validity at the higher-order level (Hair et al., 2019). The Fornell–Larcker criterion is used to assess discriminant validity and the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs, confirming the existence of adequate discriminant validity among the constructs (see Table 4) (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4: Validating second-order constructs measurement model

Construct	Item	Loading	α	CR	AVE	VIF
Strategic leadership competency	VIS	0.760	0.780	0.845	0.677	1.764
	STS	0.667				1.331
	CMS	0.680				1.335
	SDMS	0.625				1.363
	TMS	0.719				1.643
	IT	0.674				1.453
Organizational citizenship behavior	OI	0.885	0.856	0.912	0.777	2.224
	DUTI	0.915				2.665
	IR	0.842				1.891
Public Organizational performance	EFF	0.865	0.884	0.906	0.762	1.955
	EI	0.887				2.157
	ICS	0.867				1.972

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model assessment constitutes a critical component of PLS-SEM, as it evaluates the hypothesized relationships among variables, tests the underlying theoretical assumptions, and examines direct and indirect effects using established quality criteria and evaluation of model through the coefficient of determination (R^2) effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2), and model fit measures (Hair et al., 2022). Accordingly, multicollinearity issue was assessed by using variance inflation factor (VIF) and the values must below 3.3 (Hair et al., 2019). The result indicates the values of VIF are less than three, indicating absence of multicollinearity among indicators.

As presented in table 5, the result of coefficient of determination (R^2) public organizational performance shows 0.664, which means 66.4% changes in public organizational performance was explained by both SLC and OCB. This represents moderate explanatory power, indicating that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variation in organizational performance. While 37.3 % change in OCB accounted by SLC alone which indicates which also moderate explanatory power (Hair et al., 2022).

Similarly, the structural model had predictive relevance values (Q^2) of public organizational performance ($Q^2 = 0.584$) and organizational citizenship behavior ($Q^2 = 0.362$) which were both above zero, suggesting the model had adequate predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022). The achieved Q^2 values indicate the model's high predictive relevance and are thereby a good indicator of the prediction power of the model, which further confirms the robustness of the proposed structural model.

Moreover, effect size (f^2) analysis results show that effect of SLC on public organizational performance ($f^2 = 0.606$) and the effect of SLC on OCB ($f^2 = 0.595$) were both large, indicating that strategic leadership competency is a major predictor of public organizational performance and

OCB. However, the effect of organizational citizenship behavior on public organizational performance ($f^2 = 0.294$) is moderate to approaching large Hair et al. (2017), suggesting that OCB also has an important practical effect on improving organizational performance, but it does not have as much impact as strategic leadership competency.

Finally, the indices of model fit suggest that the structural model has an acceptable overall fit. In particular, the standardized root means square residual (SRMR) of 0.072 is lower than the recommended threshold of 0.08(Hair et al., 2022). This means the difference between the observed and model-implied covariance matrices is low. In addition, normed fit index (NFI) value of 0.903 is higher than the 0.90, which indicates that the proposed model has a good fit with the observed data (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5: Quality criteria and model fit summery

R²		F²		Q2		Model fit	
Construct	Value	construct	Value	construct	value	SRMR	NFI
POP	0.664	SLC—>POP	0.606	POP	0.584	0.072	0.903
OCB	0.373	SLC—> OCB	0.595	OCB	0.362		
		OCB—> POP	0.294				

After establishing measurement model an in-depth analysis of the hypotheses concerning the influence of SLC on POP and OCB, and the effect of OCB on POP and the mediating role of OCB in public organizations context have conducted. Each hypothesis is substantiated by robust statistical evidence.

The result indicates positive and significant influence of strategic leadership competency on public organizational performance ($\beta = 0.435$, $p = 0.000$, $T = 5.699$), indicating acceptance of Hypothesis 1. Additionally, significant and positive effect of strategic leadership competency on OCB is established ($\beta = 0.616$, $p = 0.000$, $T = 11.233$), showing the acceptance of Hypothesis 2. Furthermore, significant and positive effect of OCB on public organizational performance ($\beta = 0.398$, $p = 0.000$, $T = 4.702$), indicating the acceptance of Hypothesis 3. Furthermore, the bootstrap confidence intervals for the direct effects exclude zero, providing additional evidence of statistical significance. Together with the significant path coefficients, these results confirm support for the direct hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.

Moreover, the mediation analysis provides strong empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that OCB plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between SLC and the performance of public organizations ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.000$, $T = 4.471$). The analysis result indicates that strategic leadership competency contributes to improved organizational performance through the mechanism of OCB.

Additionally, the absence of zero within the bootstrapped confidence interval provides strong evidence for mediating role of OCB. As depicted in table 6, because both the direct and indirect paths are significant and positive, the model reflects complementary partial mediation of OCB in

relation between SLC and OP, where OCB partially transmits the influence of SLC on OP while a direct effect remains between SLC and OP.

Moreover, organizational citizenship behavior explains 35.9% of the variance accounted for (VAF) on the direct paths, thereby signifies a complementary partial mediation role of organizational citizenship behavior (Hair, et al.,2022). The findings are supported statistically by the empirical evidence and provide quantitative information on the interrelationships between OC, OP, and SL. The results suggest that the improvement of strategic leadership effectiveness is possible through organizational citizenship behavior and using performance-oriented strategies.

Table 6: Result of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Path	β	T= Statistics	Confidence interval bias		P-Value	Decision
				5%(LL)	95%(UL)		
H1	SLC -> OP	0.435	5.699	0.314	0.564	0.000	H1-supported
H2	SLC -> OCB	0.616	11.233	0.513	0.698	0.000	H1-supported
H3	OCB -> OP	0.398	4.702	0.254	0.530	0.000	H1-supported
H4	SLC -> OCB -> OP	0.245	4.471	0.159	0.337	0.000	H4-supported

Note: OCB partially mediates the relation between SLC and OP

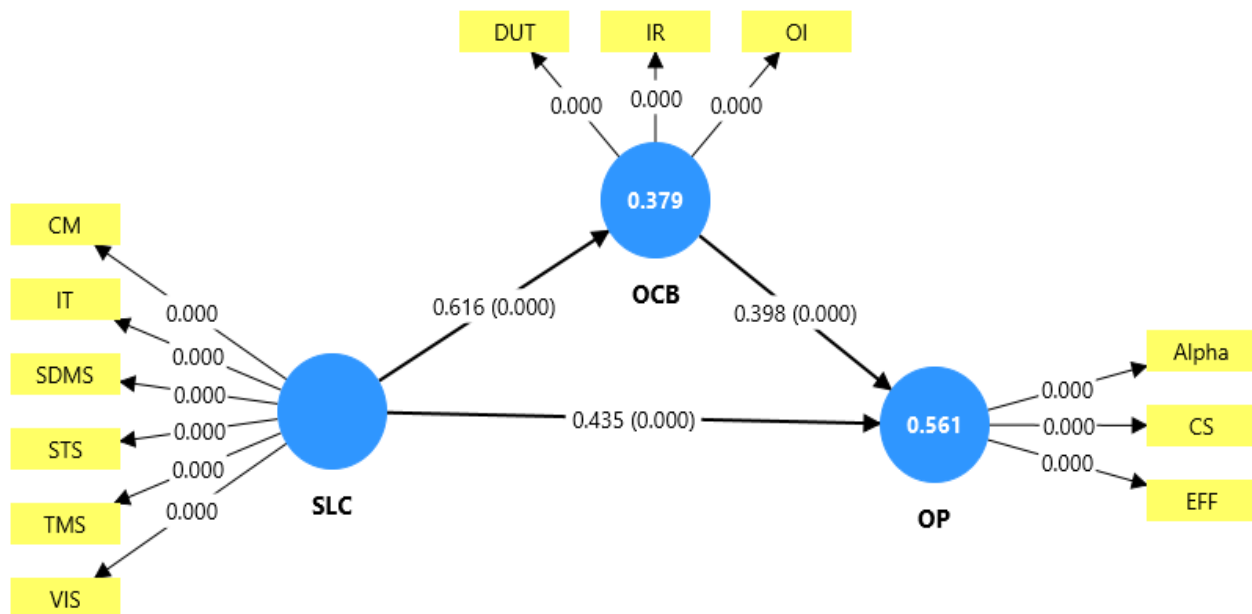


Figure 1: Structural Equation model

Discussion

The present study investigated how strategic leadership competency is related to the performance of public organization mediated by OCB. The results add to the development of theory by extending knowledge of the linkages between SLC, OCB and POP, and offer meaningful application implications that could enhance leadership practices and boost organizational effectiveness.

Accordingly, the study shows SLC positively and significantly influences POP. This finding suggests that SLC is important in improving internal customer satisfaction, public organizational efficiency, and effectiveness to carry out the government's goals and objectives. In Ethiopia, including Oromia Regional State contexts public organizations characterized by resource limitations, policy adjustments and growing public needs, competent leaders maximize resources, deal with change, create innovation, and build organizational capacity.

Similarly, previous studies also confirmed that SLC has positive and significant influence on POP (Logan, 2024; Patrick & Lu, 2025). These studies reveal a consistent and empirically supported pattern across diverse research contexts, emphasizing the significant influence of strategic leadership competency on public organizational performance.

However, inconstancy is common in literature. Accordingly, some scholars argued that the effect of SLC on performance is depends on intervening organizational mechanisms such as organizational culture, climate, structure (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022; Haule & Mushi, 2024). Although, the current study establishes relatively strong statistical evidence with significant influence of SLC on POP, further investigation required that may depend on longitudinal study and more statistical approach.

This finding is confirmed by RBV which states that superior organizational performance is a result of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable internal resources (strategic leadership competency) that an organization has. Strategic leadership competency is also a strategic intangible resource which serves as an enabler for mobilizing, developing and deploying other organizational resources to further increase the effectiveness, efficiency and overall performance of an organization (Barney et al., 2021).

Additionally, the current study statistically validates that SLC has positive and significant effect on dimensions of OCB such as organizational involvement, dutifulness and interpersonal relation in public organizations. Competent strategic leaders encourage employees to go beyond their formal job responsibilities by voluntarily engaging in extra-role behaviors that strengthen organizational effectiveness and overall performance. This finding aligns with previous research which confirmed that strategic leadership competency influence employee's dictionary behavior that enables employees contributes for advanced public organizational performance (Gusmão et al., 2018; Nleya & Chummun, 2022).

Furthermore, the study explores positive and significant influences of OCB and POP in the public organizations. It suggests that improving organizational citizenship behavior leads to improved efficiency, effectiveness and internal customer satisfaction in public organizations, indicating a positive relationship. Therefore, effective cultivation of citizenship behavior is crucial advancing performance in public organizations.

The finding of the study coincides with prior studies emphasizing the impact of organizational citizenship behavior on performance in public organizations (de Geus et al., 2020; Temesgen, 2024). Moreover, the finding is grounded the Social Exchange Theory which suggests that employees' discretionary behaviors foster cooperation, knowledge sharing and service quality which in turn improves the effectiveness of the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Moreover, this study found OCB has partial and complimentary mediating role in relation between SLC and POP. The finding indicates that SLC influences POP both directly and through mediating role of OCB.

In line with this finding, some empirical studies indicated the mediating role of OCB in the relation between SLC and POP (Organ, 2026; Tai et al., 2012). However, contradiction exist among some literature. For example, (Commer et al., 2017) found that OCB alone did not significantly mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. Tough, the current study provides slightly significant empirical evidence to literature for the role of OCB as a mediator, further study needed to provide a more robust and generalizable mediation effect between of OCB.

In Oromia Regional state public organizations context, the mediating effect of organizational citizenship behavior implies that strategically competent leaders required to encourage and motivate employees to act willingly beyond their job duties. These out-of-role behaviors, which enhance team working, knowledge transfer, quality of service and effectiveness of operations within public organizations, where organizations challenged by resource constraints, bureaucratic processes, or by the current changes within the public sector.

Theoretically, this finding is supported by RBV and SET. In the RBV framework, strategic leadership competency is a valuable organizational resource that encourage and enhance Organizational citizenship behavior, which in turn improve sustainable organizational performance (Barney et al., 2021).

Similarly, Social Exchange Theory argues that the development of competent and supportive leadership leads to a positive employee attitude, which fosters employee discretionary behaviors that go beyond job requirements and can ultimately enhance organizational performance (Walumbwa et al., 2011)

Conclusion

The present study explored the strategic leadership competency public organizational performance, specifically the mediation role of the OCB in public organizations in Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia. The findings from PLS-SEM analysis showed that the measurement and structural models met the recommended criteria, meaning that the proposed model was statistically valid, reliable and robust with respect to explaining the relationships between the constructs of the study.

All hypothesized relationships were comprehensively tested in this study in line with the study's objectives and hypotheses. The empirical results showed that the strategic leadership competency has a positive and significant direct effect on public organizational performance and organizational

citizenship behavior. The findings of this study highlight the importance of strategic leadership competency to improve public organizations' performance in the complex organizational context and the ever-increasing citizens' service demand in the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia.

In addition, OCB has significant and positive effect on POP. Furthermore, the finding of the study reveals OCB partially and complimentary mediates the relation between SLC and public organizational performance, suggesting that SLC has not only has a direct and but also indirect effect on POP via OCB.

Moreover, methodological triangulation was used to enhance the credibility and interpretative depth of the findings by offering a complementary source to the results of the present study, complementing previous empirical literature and theoretical perceptions. This integrative approach enabled a more holistic view of the complex interaction between the SLC, OCB and POP. The study employed multiple evidence and complementary theories to build a strong and multi-dimensional understanding of the mechanisms that link strategic leadership competency to organizational performance. This thorough analytical process, therefore, increased the validity, consistency, and theoretical coherence of the findings, offering strong empirical evidence and theoretical justification for the observed relationships.

The result of this study has significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study adds empirical evidence to the literature on strategic leadership competency and organizational behavior, through the mechanisms that demonstrate how the strategic leadership competency affects public organizational performance, and how organizational citizenship behavior has a complementary mediating function. The study combines the concepts of the RBV and SET which adds to the theory's understanding of how leadership competencies are related to improved organizational performance through the behavioral and organizational mechanisms.

In practice, the results reinforce the need to build strategic leadership competency and promote organizational citizenship behavior at the same time as complementary organizational structure. In this regard, public institutions in Oromia Regional State should pay attention to strategic leadership competency development activities and foster an environment focused on discretionary and cooperative actions of its personnel to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and performance of the institution.

Implications of the study

Theoretical implications

This study extends competency-based strategic leadership perspectives by applying them to the unique institutional context of a developing country, thus increasing the potential outside of the public sector for application of the perspectives. The significance of the study is in the empirical evidence and the found positive and significant relationship between SLC and the POP. The findings contribute to the understanding of leadership in public sector by creating a focus on the importance of a competency-based approach as one of the key factors contributing to the performance of public organizations.

Previous studies demonstrated mixed findings on the relation between SLC and POP. Additionally, empirical studies indicated inconsistency of finding on the mediating role of organizational citizenship behavior in the relation between SLC and POP. Hence, this study contributes to fill these inconsistent empirical findings through highlighting the integrating SLC with OCB for public organizational effectiveness. The study advocates a holistic perspective on organizational management by emphasizing the importance of fostering employees' OCB alongside SLC to enhance organizational effectiveness and accountability, thereby offering a stronger theoretical foundation for future research on public organizational performance.

RBV AND SET provide theoretical foundations to examine the relation among SLC, OCB and POP. Therefore, by integrating these theories the study extends existing leadership theories by demonstrating that strategic leadership competency influences public organizational performance both directly and indirectly through organizational citizenship behavior. This finding refines current theoretical understanding by highlighting the behavioral mechanisms through which strategic leadership translates into improved organizational performance.

Practical implications

Policymakers should design competency-based strategies for leadership development. Thus, policy makers should design strategic leadership competency model and forward to public organizations for effective implementation. Additionally, the result enables policy makers to recognize areas for improvement thereby develop legal frameworks to integrate strategic leadership competency and organizational citizenship behavior within public organizations structure.

Public organizations should focus on training programs that move beyond general leadership training and implement tailored development programs that specifically cultivate strategic leadership competencies known to foster organizational citizenship behavior. This includes training in vision articulation, strategic thinking, and change and talent management, strategic decision making and innovative thinking skills that supports long-term capability building. Further, the organizations should design competency-based leadership selection, assignment, and even disposition should depend on the extent to which the leaders are competent enough or not in order to drive organizational performance and organizational citizenship behavior.

Leaders in public organizations should also refine and strengthening employee citizenship behavior which emphasis on promoting employees' discretionary contributions that helps to improve organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and overall public service performance.

The recommendations are important as they can be integrated into existing public sector leadership development and performance management systems. Yet there are resource constraints, institutional capacity deficits, resistance to change, and challenges in measuring citizenship behaviors to contend with when implementing. Hence effective policy commitment, capacity development, an organizational culture that supports implementation and an effective monitoring system are key to successful implementation.

Limitation of the study

The drawback in current study related to evaluating strategic leadership competency in limited areas of competencies and single mediating variable. Future research should pay more attention to influence of strategic leadership competency on public organizational performance by including more competencies and the mediating role of additional variable (multi mediating variables). The cross-sectional may not establish strong cause and effect relation among variables over a long period. Therefore, future research should depend on longitudinal approach to establish strong cause and effect relations among variables. Methodologically, relying on quantitative data may not enable to understand the issue in depth. Thus, future researcher should consider mixed research approach to reach on breadth and depth understanding.

Ethical Approval

The study received approval from the Ethiopian Public Service University with reference number, RAD/031/2025 dated 02 January 2025. All research work was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the university and the applicable research rules and in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

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