

## **Church Innovation and Effective Leadership in Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya churches: Evidence from Kiambu County**

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### **Abstract**

*This study determined the influence of church innovation on effective leadership in Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) churches focusing on Kiambu County. Despite leadership playing a key role in supporting church growth and sustainability, many churches continue to experience challenges such as inconsistent leadership practices, difficulties in leadership succession, and differences in leadership effectiveness, which affect overall church performance and member involvement. The study focused on church innovation as a factor influencing effective leadership. A descriptive research design was used, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data was collected using questionnaires from church leaders and council members, as well as an interview with a key informant, and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, and thematic analysis respectively. The findings revealed that church innovation strongly contribute positively to effective leadership ( $r = .548$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The study concludes that effective leadership in churches can be enhanced through leadership practices that promote innovation. It recommends that churches adopt more collaborative and innovative approaches to ministry.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Church innovation, Servant leadership, Theological training, Denominational structure.

### **Introduction**

Leadership has been widely discussed over time, yet there is still no single agreed definition of what makes an effective leader. In general, leadership involves influencing others to work together towards shared goals (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). In the church context, leadership goes beyond administration and includes providing spiritual guidance, mentoring, and ensuring the growth and well-being of members (Belay et al., 2021). Effective leadership is therefore essential for both the spiritual development of believers and the overall growth of the church (Latif et al., 2022).

Church innovation refers to introduction of new products, processes and ideas into the church (Dunaetz, 2021). This comes as a result of modernity a historical period that introduced a different set of values, norms and practices (Crosweiler & Tschakert, 2019). Modern lifestyle has introduced information machinery which has eased communication and information access; thus, church leaders can adopt new communication technology to efficiently communicate their goals and objectives to congregants. Globally, churches are operating in increasingly complex and changing environments that require leaders to be adaptable and responsive. However, many churches continue to face leadership challenges such as weak

governance structures, lack of strategic direction, and difficulties in responding to modern societal changes (Ngema et al., 2021). These challenges have, to some extent, affected church growth, reduced member engagement, and limited the church's influence in society (Ndonye, 2018).

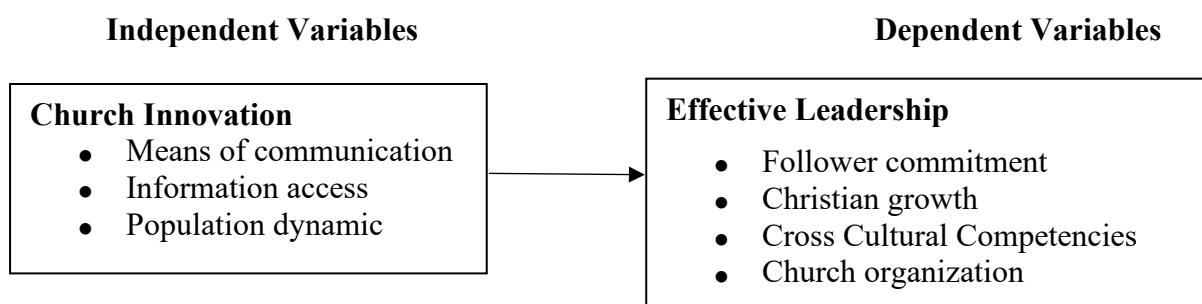
In Africa and Kenya, churches have adopted approaches such as the adoption of digital communication platforms to improve leadership. This has aided churches to reach wider audiences and improve engagement, especially among younger members (Ugboh, 2023). Regardless of these efforts, variations in leadership effectiveness still exist across denominations and local church contexts. The Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) operates within a structured governance system with branches across different regions, including Kiambu County. Churches in this region are influenced by urban dynamics due to their proximity to Nairobi, exposing them to diverse social and cultural changes. While some churches have embraced technological innovation and structured leadership practices, there are still clear differences in leadership effectiveness across local congregations.

FPFK churches specifically in Kiambu County continue to experience challenges such as inconsistencies in leadership practices and variations in how leadership roles are executed. Church leaders often face the challenge of balancing spiritual responsibilities with administrative duties. These issues indicate that leadership effectiveness is not uniform and may be influenced by several underlying factors. Although there are studies on church leadership, limited research has focused on the specific factors influencing effective leadership within FPFK churches in Kiambu County. This creates a gap in understanding how church innovation contributes to leadership effectiveness in this context. This study hence seeks to determine this factor to provide insights that can enhance leadership practices within the church.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Conceptual Framework***

A conceptual framework is a schematic framework indicating the link between independent and dependent variables in a study. This study hypothesized that effective leadership is dependent on church innovation. Hence, the independent variable in the study is church innovation while the dependent variable is effective leadership. Church innovation was operationalized as means of communication, information access and population dynamics. The relationship between the independent and dependent variable is as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*

### ***Empirical Review***

Church innovation refers to adoption of new products, processes and ideas in the church (Dunaetz, 2021). Church innovation has largely been influenced by modernity, which defines a historical period that introduced a different set of values, norms and practices (Crosweiler & Tschakert, 2019), thus improving and replacing the existing values. Through modernization, lifestyle patterns have changed, thus influencing the religious values and practices in society. The growing elements of modernization have continued to reshape the traditional and religious values and culture. Over the past, at least 50 years, technology has developed and replaced the traditional ways of doing things. Church innovation has improved on means communication, information access and population dynamics, which has impacted efficient leadership in aspects of follower commitment, Christian growth, cross cultural competencies and church organization.

Different studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of church innovation through adoption of new technology on religious practices that inform the leadership of church organization. Arthur and Rensleigh (2015) investigated technology usage in small churches, on whether the church leaders understand the opportunities created by use of online technologies. The study took a quantitative study approach where members of four small churches (with a population of 1-500 members) in Johannesburg metropolitan were surveyed. The study results acknowledged the importance of online technologies for members to access information on church happenings. This enhances the involvement of the church members and their participation in church activities. In addition, the study noted that online technology as part of young generation culture, hence the need for church leaders to adopt new technologies to cater for population dynamics and promote commitment to church.

In his article, Rankin (2024) discusses the implication of the digital church for Christian leaders. According to Rankin, the use of internet and digital revolution has created a lasting impact, thus leaders ought to come up with strategies that integrate the innovations in their activities. Embracing a digital church has theoretical, theological, biblical and leadership implications on the biblical community. Rankin argues that internet can potentially offer support to ministry leaders, hence the necessity to embrace digital church. Through digital communication, the church leaders can psychologically link with their members (Nseraka & Nwanze, 2021), as well as relate and deepen their relations with the members (Smith, 2016).

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive research design to determine the factors influencing effective leadership in Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) churches in Kiambu County. The design was appropriate as it enabled the study to describe relationships between variables and provide both quantitative and qualitative insights.

The target population included church leaders actively involved in governance and leadership within FPFK churches in Kiambu County, including the Presiding Bishop, pastors, and church council members. A sample of 65 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula, while a census approach was used to include the Presiding Bishop as a key informant. Stratified random sampling was applied to ensure representation across different leadership levels.

Structured questionnaires and a semi-structured interview guide were used to collect data. Questionnaires, which included Likert-scale items, were administered to pastors and church council members to collect quantitative data on church innovation, servant leadership,

theological training, denominational structure, and leadership effectiveness. Additionally, an in-depth interview was conducted with the Presiding Bishop to provide qualitative insights. A pilot test was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the research instruments. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, and all variables recorded coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating good internal consistency.

A research permit was sought from National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) to approve data collection from the country's public sector. Data collection was conducted through online questionnaires via Google forms and a face-to-face interview with the key informant. The Ethical considerations were observed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and securing the necessary research approvals. The dully filled questionnaires were cleaned and coded and data entered in Statistical Package for Social Science software for analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, as well as inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation, to determine relationships between variables. The recorded interview was transcribed and sorted for analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and support interpretation of the quantitative findings.

## **Results**

The study achieved a high response rate; out of 65 questionnaires, 60 were duly filled and returned representing 92.3% response rate. This response rate was considered adequate for analysis, interpretation and generalization of the study findings. Respondents' demographic characteristics were analyzed and are presented in Table 1. Among the respondents, 60% male and 40% female, indicating a balanced representation. In terms of age, the majority were between 26–35 years and above 40 years, suggesting participation from both younger and experienced leaders. On number of years in leadership positions, most respondents had over 10 years of leadership experience, indicating that the data was obtained from individuals with sufficient knowledge and understanding of church leadership. The study captured perspectives from key leadership positions with majority of respondents being church council members, followed by pastors and senior pastors.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Per cent (%)</b>
Gender	Male	60
	Female	40
Age	18-25	8.3
	26-35	35
	35-40	23.3
	Above 40	33.3
Leadership Experience	Less than 2 years	10.0
	2-5 years	18.3
	6-10 years	15.0
	Above 10 years	56.7
Leadership Positions	Church Council	81.67
	Assistant Pastor	8.33
	Senior Pastor	10.00

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

This paper investigated the influence of church innovation on effective leadership in FPFK churches in Kiambu County. The respondents were requested to complete a questionnaire containing Likert-scale items, with response options ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (SA). The findings showed that the independent variable under study; church innovation, positively influence effective leadership.

#### *Church Innovation*

Church innovation recorded a high aggregate mean score (M = 4.20), reflecting strong agreement that practices such as the use of social media and different communication methods enhance leadership effectiveness.

**Table 2**

*Effect of church innovation on effective church leadership*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Our church has embraced heterogenous modes of communication.	60	4.25	1.052
Our church has embraced social media to relay church information	60	4.55	0.746
Our church leadership have embraced measures aimed at enhancing church information access.	60	4.4	0.807
Our church holds regular activities that blends cultural and religious practices	60	3.833	1.152
Our church services are customized according to population age groups	60	3.967	1.365
<b>Aggregate Score</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>1.024</b>

The highest-rated practice is the use of social media to relay church information (M = 4.55, SD = 0.746), suggesting widespread adoption and consistency. Similarly, churches have implemented measures to enhance information access (M = 4.4, SD = 0.807) and diverse communication methods (M = 4.25, SD = 1.052). However, variations were observed in areas such as blending cultural and religious practices and service customization, suggesting differences in implementation across churches.

#### *Effective Leadership in FPFK Churches*

Effective leadership was the study's dependent variable. The respondents were requested to complete a questionnaire containing Likert-scale items, with response options ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (SA). The collected data was analysed as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Effective Leadership in FPFK churches in Kiambu County*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Personalized contact	60	4.55	0.675
Regular capacity building sessions	60	4.650	0.633
Formation of organization technical teams	60	4.467	0.747
Centralized communication contact	60	4.433	0.871
Clear unit of command	60	4.400	0.887
Adoption of intranet communication	60	4.717	0.524
<b>Aggregated Mean Score</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>4.468</b>	<b>0.749</b>

Overall, the findings indicate a strong positive perception of organizational practices on effective leadership in FPFK churches which was highly rated ( $M = 4.468$ ,  $SD = 0.749$ ), particularly in areas such as communication, capacity building, and personalized engagement. Respondents highly agreed that the adoption of intranet communication ( $M = 4.717$ ,  $SD = 0.524$ ) and regular capacity-building sessions ( $M = 4.650$ ,  $SD = 0.633$ ) significantly promotes effectiveness, indicating strong emphasis on communication and continuous learning. Personalized contact ( $M = 4.55$ ) and the formation of technical teams ( $M = 4.467$ ) further highlighted the role of collaboration and engagement.

In addition, centralized communication systems ( $M = 4.433$ ) and clear unit of command ( $M = 4.400$ ) are perceived as enhancing coordination and promoting accountability. Overall, the results suggest that structured communication, teamwork, and continuous development are key drivers of organizational effectiveness.

### ***Inferential Statistics***

Correlation analysis revealed that the independent variables had a positive and statistically significant relationship with effective leadership as indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Correlation Analysis Test*

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation (r)</b>	<b>Significance (p-value)</b>
Church Innovation	.548	<.001

Church innovation demonstrated the strongest relationship ( $r = .548$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that innovation plays a key role in enhancing leadership effectiveness.

### **Qualitative Findings**

The interview with the Presiding Bishop supported the quantitative results and provided deeper insights into leadership practices. The findings were presented thematically.

**Table 5**

*Summary of Themes from Interview with Bishop*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key Insight</b>	<b>Supporting Response</b>
Effective Leadership	Leadership focuses on serving and benefiting others	“Effective leadership is.... helping others rather than achieving power.”
Church Innovation	Technology enhances communication and coordination	“We use WhatsApp Zoom.... and Facebook.... to communicate effectively.”
Leadership Challenges	Education level and location affect leadership	“Some are educated; others are not.... Urban and rural areas differ.”

Church innovation was highlighted through the use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom to enhance communication and coordination. The interview also highlighted challenges such as differences in education levels and variations between urban and rural church contexts, which affect leadership effectiveness. Suggestions for improvements included continuous adoption of innovative strategies to enhance leadership effectiveness.

### **Discussion of Results**

The findings of this study indicate that effective leadership in FPFK churches in Kiambu County is influenced by a combination of innovation, leadership style, training, and organizational structure. These results demonstrate that leadership effectiveness within faith-based institutions is multidimensional and cannot be described by a single factor.

Church innovation emerged as the most influential factor, showing the strongest positive relationship with effective leadership ( $r = .548, p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that adopting digital tools and modern communication strategies strengthens leadership effectiveness and member engagement. This finding is consistent with studies by Arthur and Rensleigh (2015) and Rankin (2024), which highlight that digital transformation enhances organizational communication and responsiveness. Correspondingly, Nseraka and Nwanze (2021) state that technology enhances interaction between leaders and followers, strengthening both engagement and organizational cohesion. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with Fry’s Spiritual Leadership Model, which highlights why vision and communication is important in fostering commitment and organizational performance.

The qualitative findings further reinforced the quantitative results by providing deeper insights into leadership practices within FPFK churches. The emphasis on the use of digital communication tools supports the statistical findings that these factors significantly influence leadership effectiveness. Additionally, the use of platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom reflects the growing role of innovation in enhancing communication and coordination, supporting findings by Ugboh (2023) on digital engagement in African churches.

Overall, the study demonstrates that effective leadership in FPFK churches can be achieved through adaptive innovation. These findings contribute to existing literature by providing context-specific evidence from Pentecostal churches in Kenya, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. The results also indicate the need for church leadership to adopt a holistic approach that balances spiritual values with modern organizational practices to enhance effectiveness and sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

Embracing innovation enables church leaders to communicate more effectively, engage diverse populations, and lead with greater impact in a contemporary church setting. The church innovation strengthens leadership by making it more responsive, connected and progressive. The diverse innovative approaches in administration, ministry programs, communication, and community engagement promote the ability of leaders to effectively guide congregations and integrate in contemporary society. Therefore, effective leadership demands for creativity, adaptability and openness to emerging strategies that impact the ministry by strengthening member participation and church growth. Churches that embrace innovation are advantaged to fulfil their mission as well as maintain solid spiritual and organizational leadership.

## **Recommendations**

Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) churches should foster innovation in church leadership by embracing digital technologies including online services and social media to enhance outreach and communication. The leaders should seek to implement creative strategies that aligns with the cultural and generational dynamics within the congregations. In addition, the leaders should regularly update the church programs and activities to maintain their relevance and responsiveness to the changing needs of the society.

Additionally, FPFK churches should consider integrating and institutionalizing leadership development into strategic planning and resource allocation. The church should consider establishing succession planning mechanisms and mentoring programs to promote sustainability for future generations. Lastly, the church should consider providing support both financially and institutional to continuous training, innovative and capacity building programs.

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