

Influence of Follower Characteristics on the Growth of Horticultural Export Firms in Kenya

Moses Simiyu^{1*}, Veronicah Kaluyu, PhD², Mary Mutisya, PhD³

^{1,2,3} *United States International University - Africa*

*E-mail: sevenada2000@yahoo.com**

***Corresponding author**

Cite: Simiyu, M., Kaluyu, V., & Mutisya, M. (2026). Influence of Follower Characteristics on the Growth of Horticultural Export Firms in Kenya. *The University Journal*, 8(2 Sup. Issue II), 58-69

Abstract

Kenya's horticulture export industry is a major contributor to the country's economy, but the industry faces declining global market share and labour management problems. The internal dynamics of these enterprises on growth and sustainability of the industry, especially the relationship between leaders and followers, is yet to be extensively explored. The purpose of this study was to establish the influence of follower characteristics on the growth of horticultural export firms in Kenya. The study was anchored on the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory and guided by a positivist research philosophy using a descriptive correlational design. The target population was 3948 managers from each of the 658 horticultural export firms in Kenya. This study used purposive and stratified random sampling technique to obtain 363 participants. Questionnaires were sent out and 300 were completed and returned, providing a response rate of 82.6%. A pilot study was conducted on 36 respondents to assess reliability of the data collection instruments. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 28 for descriptive and inferential statistics. The study findings determined that conscientiousness was the most powerful predictor of growth ($\beta = .385$), followed by openness ($\beta = .197$) and competence ($\beta = .156$). However, agreeableness was not significant ($\beta = .065$, $p = .312$). The overall results confirm that follower characteristics are key organizational resources which support sustainable growth of Kenyan horticultural export companies. The study recommends that industry regulators such as Horticultural Crops Directorate Advisory Committee should come up with regulations that foster in-service continuous professional development, and skill training programs.

Key Words: Follower characteristics, Growth, Horticultural export firms.

Introduction

Growth is a basic measure of a firm's survival, competition and value creation capability. For agricultural export companies, it can manifest in higher revenue, profitability, export quantities, export market share, production capacity, and product diversification and resilience to market disruptions (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2024; Nzomoi et al., 2022). Focusing on agriculture, global exports in 2023 were 1.7 times higher than

in 2010, and horticulture exports also added up to around \$1.5 trillion and accounted for 374 million jobs in 2024 (FAO, 2024). However, because horticultural products are perishable, have high-quality standards and are subject to phytosanitary rules, as well as to high international competition, export companies face a lot of challenges that hinder their growth (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has been identified as one of the most useful models to explain the influence of intra-organizational relationships on company development. This theory suggests that there are different levels of relationship between leaders and followers, from an exchange in the form of role relationships to high-quality relationships that are based on trust, respect, support and mutual obligation (Latifoglu et al., 2023). A positive LMX relationship in the workplace is related to employees' performance, innovation, job performance, organizational learning and proactive behaviours (Dar et al., 2023). While follower, leader, interpersonal and contextual factors all play a role in the development of LMX, follower characteristics are particularly significant as they can actively contribute to the development and outcomes of the leader-follower relationship.

Some of the attributes of followers are competence, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness dependability, self-efficacy, commitment, initiative, and willingness to perform beyond the scope of their job description (Dar et al., 2023; Latifoglu et al., 2023). The qualities are especially important in horticultural exporters, where workers are engaged in tasks related to quality like harvesting, grading, packing, cold chain handling, record keeping, and meeting buyer requirements. Competent and proactive followers are able to win the trust of leaders, involve them in decision-making and offer ideas for enhancing quality, minimizing wastage and boosting operational efficiency (Khattak et al., 2023). Additionally, Tanaka and Ishiyama (2023) found that proactive behaviour and job crafting mediate the link between LMX relationships and employee performance and innovation, suggesting that followers play an active role in organizational growth and development.

The horticultural subsector creates about 33% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from agriculture, directly employs nearly 350,000 people and provides jobs for over 6 million people in Kenya (FPEAK, 2025; Kangai & Gwademba, 2025). However, horticultural companies are subjected to highly regulated export markets, which demand traceability, safety certification, pesticide-residue and buyer standards. There are existing studies in Kenya such as Kanake and Kemboi (2020) and Njue (2021) on how the LMX relationship, employee empowerment and innovative behaviour influence export performance, but studies have not fully investigated the role of follower characteristics on the multidimensional growth of horticultural export firms. Thus, this study investigated the influence of follower characteristics on the financial, operational, market, reputational and human-capital development of horticultural export companies in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Follower characteristics has been widely recognized for their positive impact on organizational outcomes such as employee engagement, productivity, and firm growth across diverse sectors (Ma et al., 2023). However, its application within the agricultural export sector, particularly Kenya's horticultural export firms, remains insufficiently explored. Existing research on Kenyan horticultural exports primarily addresses external and operational challenges such as compliance with international standards, market access constraints, and infrastructural limitations (Ng'ethe, 2022; Kenya Horticulture Council,

2023) with little focus on internal employee dynamics that drive firm growth and resilience. Kenya's horticultural export sector is a significant economic contributor, accounting for about 22% of agricultural exports and supporting thousands of livelihoods (Githiga et al., 2024). Despite this, firms face challenges including declining global market share and labour management issues (Kariuki et al., 2024). Existing leadership interventions have not sufficiently linked follower characteristics to key growth outcomes like revenue expansion and employee retention. By moving beyond the structural and environmental challenges typically emphasized in existing studies, this research aimed to generate new knowledge on how internal leadership processes can drive sustainable organizational growth and enhance competitiveness within the horticultural export sector and similar export-driven industries globally. The study sought to determine the influence of follower characteristics on the growth of horticultural export firms in Kenya.

Literature Review

The LMX theory developed by Dansereau et al. (1975) explains the varied relationships that leaders form with individual followers. LMX theory differs from traditional leadership theories which treat relationships between leaders and followers as one-size-fits-all, by suggesting that the relationship between a leader and follower is unique and occurs through a series of exchange interactions involving trust, respect, support, and mutual obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Adopting a social exchange theory perspective (Blau, 1964), LMX identifies two types of in-group relationships: high quality (more autonomy, influence, and resources) and formal (less autonomy, influence, and resources), and two types of out-group relationships: high quality (more autonomy, influence, and resources) and formal (less autonomy, influence, and resources) (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015).

Empirical studies relate high LMX to employee commitment, collaboration, innovation, performance and organizational resilience (Fein & Tziner, 2021; Omilion-Hodges & Ptacek, 2021). But as long as differentiated exchanges can lead to perceptions of favoritism, inequality and conflict, it can reduce team cohesion (Liden et al., 1997). In the present study, the role of the follower characteristics on growth of horticultural export companies is explained using LMX theory. Followers can gain leaders' trust, receive more support, and engage in the organization's decision-making process if they are competent, dependable, have initiative and are committed and self-efficacious (Dar et al., 2023). Such exchanges improve productivity, innovation, employee retention, quality standards to meet export market requirements, and responsiveness to export market challenges (Kanake & Kemboi, 2020). Thus, financial, operational, market, reputational, and human-capital growth is possible because follower characteristics could result in better leader–follower relationships.

Empirical evidence shows that followers' characteristics affect employee performance and can therefore impact the growth of the organization. Altaf et al. (2021) revealed that agreeableness had positive prediction for group performance ($\beta = .298$, $p < .05$) and it mitigated the perception of retaliation from teammates. Another study by Nunoo (2022) found that personality traits are positively related to employee performance in Ghana. Similarly, Nzumbi (2023) found that conscientiousness ($\beta = .416$, $p = .032$) and agreeableness ($\beta = .370$, $p = .041$) significantly predicted job performance, while Agnoli et al. (2021) found that openness was associated with higher creative originality. In Kenya, Mwingirwa et al. (2024) conducted a survey of 373 employees of 17 Fairtrade horticultural companies and found that employee commitment had a positive effect on employee engagement ($\beta = .454$, $p < .05$). While this study did not involve the direct assessment of

the attributes of followers, it highlighted the significance of employee commitment in horticultural businesses.

A similar study by Wardana et al. (2023) concluded that employee competence, organizational justice and work motivation accounted for 60.4% of the variance in employee performance. Competence also showed a greater effect on the performance of agricultural extension officers with a $\beta = .711$, $p = .001$ as compared to motivation and work environment. The results indicate that people with knowledge and expertise improve productivity and operational efficiency. Most studies, however, studied students or public organization employees, or the general workplace, rather than firm-level growth, and looked at individual performance instead of firm performance. This study sought to fill this gap by investigating the role of followers' competence, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness on the multi-dimensional development of horticultural export firms in Kenya.

A conceptual framework provides a visual relationship between various variables often derived from one or more theories (Saunders et al., 2023). As depicted in Figure 1, the dependent variable for this study was growth of the horticultural export firms which was measured using financial growth, operational growth, market growth and reputational and human capital growth. organizational growth and was measured by project management success, project success, and NGO success. The independent variable of the study was follower characteristics which was operationalized using competence, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness.

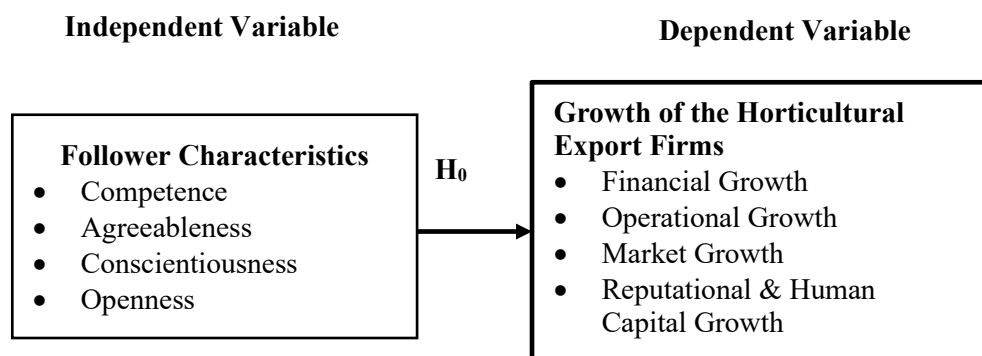


Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Based on this conceptual framework, the following null hypothesis was tested:

H₀: Follower characteristics have no statistically significant influence on the growth of horticultural export firms in Kenya.

Methodology

The research used positivist research philosophy and descriptive correlational design because the study did not involve manipulating the study variables (Saunders et al., 2023). The population of interest included 3,948 top level managers, middle level managers and supervisors from 658 registered horticultural export companies as provided by the Agriculture and Food Authority (AFA) in Kenya. A sample of 363 respondents was

selected, using Yamane's formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The managerial categories were purposively identified and then the proportional stratified random sampling method used to ensure representation for the three management levels (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

Primary data was obtained from a semi-structured questionnaire, with the use of seven-point Likert items, from September to October 2025. Competence, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness were the follower characteristics and financial, operational, market, reputational, and human capital measures were used to assess firm growth. The instrument validity and reliability measured through a pilot study conducted among 36 respondents (Bujang et al., 2024). The content validity was determined by experts and construct validity was determined by factor analysis (Shrestha, 2021). The questionnaires were administered to 363 sample respondents and 300 were returned, resulting in an 82.6% return rate. Descriptive statistics, and linear regression were used for the data analysis at 5% level of significance using SPSS version 26. Informed consent and confidentiality were observed and participation was voluntary.

Results

The respondents were predominantly male with 59.3% compared to 40.7% of the female respondents. The age breakdown of the respondents was fairly even, with a significant number aged between 30-39 (34%) and 40-49 (32%). In terms of education, 54% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree and 24% had a master's degree, indicating a high level of education among the responding managers. The majority of participants had extensive organizational experience, with 32% having between 5 and 10 years' experience, 28% with 11–15 years' experience and 24% having over 15 years' experience. The respondents were also evenly spread across various departments, including production, human resources, operations, finance, administration and other departments. The sample comprised small, medium and large businesses from all areas of Central Kenya, Rift Valley, Eastern, Nairobi, and Coast regions.

The dependent variable in the study was growth of horticultural export firms in Kenya. This was measured using for dimensions that included financial growth operational growth market growth and reputational and human capital growth. Responses were analyzed using means and standard deviations and the findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis of Growth of Horticultural Export Firms

Aspects of Growth	Std.	
Financial Growth	Mean	Deviation
The firm's annual revenue has improved over the past three years.	5.59	.988
Profit margins have remained stable or increased over time.	5.77	.927
Operating costs have increased faster than profits in recent years (reverse coded).	5.62	1.010
Operational Growth		
Employee productivity has improved in the firm	5.68	.960
The use of technology has increased operational efficiency	5.70	.899
The firm uses its resources more effectively than before	5.58	1.004
Market Growth		
The firm's export market share has expanded.	5.73	.976

The firm is competitive within the horticultural export sector.	5.64	.950
Customer satisfaction with the firm's products and services has increased.	5.79	.958
Reputational & Human Capital Growth		
Industry reputation has strengthened	5.75	.918
Employee retention has improved	5.82	.867
Customer satisfaction has increased	5.74	.968
Average	5.70	0.952

The findings in Table 1 on financial growth of horticultural export firms showed that the firms had a consistent positive performance in the last three years. Respondents agreed that there was an increase in annual revenue (Mean = 5.59, SD = 0.988) and no change or growing profit margins (Mean = 5.77, SD = 0.927). The mean for the reverse coded item that operating costs had increased faster than profits in recent years showed agreement (Mean = 5.62, SD = 1.010). This indicated that respondents were of the view that operating costs had increased at a lower rate than profits in recent years, implying that the firms were dealing with cost pressures well and were also able to maintain the profitability. Therefore, these results demonstrated good financial management behaviour, which would help the firms to grow further.

Respondents agreed to the provided statements on operational growth indicating increases in productivity and efficiency at the firms. Respondents agreed that employee productivity had improved (Mean = 5.68, SD = 0.960) and the incorporation of technology led to increased operational efficiency (Mean = 5.70, SD = 0.899). Moreover, respondents also opined that the use of resources was more effective than before (Mean = 5.58, SD = 1.004). These findings indicate that operational activities had been developed to facilitate scalable expansion, with a combination of human and technological resources to optimize performance.

Market growth descriptive statistics showed that the horticultural export firms were expanding their markets and competitiveness. Respondents were of the view that the firms were experiencing an increase in export market share (Mean = 5.73, SD = 0.976) and competitiveness in the horticultural export industry (Mean = 5.64, SD = 0.950). Respondents also agreed that there was an increase in customer satisfaction with the firm's products and services (Mean = 5.79, SD = 0.958). This means that strategies that were market-oriented were successfully addressing the expectation of markets and customer satisfaction. These findings emphasize the ability of the firms to expand their market share and to increase the number of export customers.

The growth in reputation and human capital was also indicated as a robust driver of firm performance. Respondents agreed that there was an increase in industry reputation (Mean = 5.75, SD = 0.918), employee retention (Mean = 5.82, SD = 0.867) and an increase in customer satisfaction (Mean = 5.74, SD = 0.968). This implied that regarding growth in human resources and reputation, the firms had significantly developed. Combined with the financial, operational, and market growth dimensions, the overall mean of all dimensions of growth was 5.70 (SD = 0.952), which shows a healthy and balanced growth trend of the horticultural export firms surveyed.

Follower characteristics was the independent variable and was measured using four constructs which were competence, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience. Various statements were provided for each construct and respondents were

required to rate them on a scale of 1 to 7. Means and standard deviation were used to analyze the responses and the findings are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Follower Characteristics

Aspects of Follower Characteristics	Mean	Std. Deviation
Competence		
My team members demonstrate adequate technical skills	5.81	.956
I can rely on employees to complete tasks without reminders.	5.51	.918
Team members adjust quickly to new systems.	5.84	.952
Agreeableness		
Employees maintain respectful working relationships.	5.78	.918
Staff willingly support each other.	5.72	.867
Employees cooperate well with supervisors and team members.	5.52	.968
Conscientiousness		
My subordinates consistently meet deadlines.	5.70	.989
Employees check their work for accuracy.	5.74	.954
Employees carry out their responsibilities in a reliable manner.	5.75	.946
Openness to Experience		
Team members consider new ideas.	5.70	.956
Staff show curiosity about better ways of working.	5.80	.881
Employees resist trying new approaches (reverse coded)	5.77	.958
Average	5.72	0.939

The findings (Table 2) on follower competence revealed that respondents were of the view that team members were well-equipped with strong technical abilities and flexibility. Respondents agreed that employees were sufficiently skilled in technical aspects (Mean = 5.81, SD = 0.956) and could adapt to new systems (Mean = 5.84, SD = 0.952). Moreover, respondents agreed that employees could perform their tasks without reminders (Mean = 5.51, SD = 0.918). These results imply that the workforce often performed to expectations and easily adjusted to change of operations. In terms of agreeableness, respondents indicated that there were positive interpersonal interactions in terms of team dynamics. Respondents agreed that employees had respectful working relationships (Mean = 5.78, SD = 0.918) and had no hesitation in supporting each other (Mean = 5.72, SD = 0.867). Teamwork with supervisors and with teammates had lower rating than the other two statements but nonetheless showing agreement (Mean = 5.52, SD = 0.968). The findings implied that the staff exhibited a supportive and collaborative attitude, which enhanced a harmonious working environment.

The level of conscientiousness was reported by the respondents to be high among the employees, which emphasized on reliability and accountability in the performance of tasks. Respondents agreed that subordinates consistently met deadlines (Mean = 5.70, SD = 0.989), checked their work accuracy (Mean = 5.74, SD = 0.954) and performed their duties reliably (Mean = 5.75, SD = 0.946). This trend of responsible conduct indicates that employees were reliable and thorough which could point to them having desirable follower characteristics.

Respondents also provided high ratings for openness to experience which was an indicator of how employees were willing to adopt innovation and improvement. Respondents indicated that team members were willing to explore new concepts (Mean = 5.70, SD = 0.956) and they were interested in new ways of working (Mean = 5.80, SD = 0.881). There was a moderately low resistance to trying new approaches that was reverse coded (Mean = 5.77, SD = 0.958), which implies an overall willingness to work with new strategies. When all factors were combined, the total average for follower characteristics was 5.72 (SD = 0.939), indicating a capable, collaborative and flexible workforce.

The study conducted a multiple linear regression to test the study hypothesis and determine the influence of the four follower characteristics (competence, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to new experience) on growth of horticultural export firms. The summary of the multiple linear regression model is provided in Table 3.

The summary multiple linear regression model in Table 3 shows that the multiple correlation coefficient was 0.664 on the model summary showing there is a moderately strong positive correlation between the dependent variable (growth) and the combined predictor variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.441$) revealed that the four constructs of follower characteristics accounted for 44.1% of the variance in the growth of horticultural export firms.

Table 3

Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.664 ^a	.441	.434	.32030

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competence, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to new experience

The results of the ANOVA in Table 4 showed that the overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 58.055$, $p < 0.001$), which indicated that the model fit could not be attributed to chance, and the model fitted much better than an intercept-only model.

Table 4

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	25.545	4	6.386	58.055	.000 ^b
Residual	32.419	295	.110		
Total	57.965	299			

a. Dependent Variable: Growth

b. Predictors: (Constant), Competence, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to new experience

The constant of 0.405 in Table 5 indicated that if the four follower characteristics were held at zero, the growth of the firms would be 0.405. Analyses of the individual regression coefficients indicated that the strongest and most statistically significant predictor was conscientiousness ($B = 0.404$, $\beta = 0.385$, $t = 7.385$, $p < 0.001$) which means that for one

unit increase in conscientiousness of followers, company growth increased by 0.404 units, controlling for the other predictors. Openness to new experience was the second most influential predictor ($B = 0.245$, $\beta = 0.197$, $t = 3.161$, $p = 0.002$), followed by competence, which also exerted a statistically significant positive influence on growth ($B = 0.185$, $\beta = 0.156$, $t = 2.487$, $p = 0.013$). These three predictors had standardized beta coefficients of 0.385, 0.197, and 0.156, respectively, indicating that conscientiousness was the strongest in influencing growth relative to the other predictors, followed by openness to new experience, and competence. Agreeableness, however, did not have a statistically significant effect on growth ($B = 0.072$; $\beta = 0.065$; $t = 1.013$; $p = 0.312$) meaning that when the effect of the other constructs is controlled for, agreeableness is not a statistically significant characteristic of a follower in the prediction of growth of horticultural export firms.

Table 5

Coefficients of Influence of Follower Characteristics on Growth

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.405	.254		1.592	.112
Competence	.185	.075	.156	2.487	.013
Agreeableness	.072	.071	.065	1.013	.312
Conscientiousness	.404	.055	.385	7.385	.000
Openness to new experience	.245	.077	.197	3.161	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Growth

The regression model derived from the analysis was;

Growth = 0.156 Competence + 0.404 Conscientiousness + 0.245 Openness to new experience.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that there was a moderately strong positive association between follower characteristics and growth of horticultural export firms ($r = .664$) which accounted for 44.1% of the variance. This statistically significant regression model, $F = 58.055$, $p < .001$, fills the empirical gap identified that existed in the previous research by demonstrating that the growth of the firm is to a certain extent influenced by the internal employee attributes, which go beyond the external factors of the market, regulations and infrastructure. The result substantiates LMX theory suggesting that effective followers elicit leaders' trust, support, resources and involvement in decision making (Dar et al., 2023; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In horticultural export companies, the exchanges have the potential to improve quality assurance, productivity and efficiency, innovation, employee retention and meeting evolving buyer needs.

Conscientiousness proved to be the most powerful predictor of growth ($\beta = .385$), followed by openness ($\beta = .197$) and competence ($\beta = .156$). Conscientiousness is important in line

with Nzumbi (2023) who concluded that reliability and goal-directed behaviour enhance performance. Additionally, the effects of openness and competence align with evidence linking openness to creativity and competence to productivity (Agnoli et al., 2021; Purbo & Genta, 2020; Wardana et al., 2023). However, in contrast, agreeableness was not significant ($\beta = .065$, $p = .312$), which is contrary to the findings Altaf et al. (2021). The results indicate that interpersonal relations skills of agreeableness can facilitate teamwork and may mitigate the growth of the team without necessarily affecting the growth of the firm, when other follower attributes are taken into account. The overall results confirm that follower characteristics are key organizational resources which support sustainable growth of Kenyan horticultural export companies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirms that follower characteristics are important factors influencing growth of horticultural export companies in Kenya. Overall, the four follower characteristics accounted for 44.1% of the variance in firm growth, supporting the importance of internal employee attributes for financial, operational, market, reputational, and human capital measures. Conscientiousness had the biggest independent effect, followed by openness and competence, while agreeableness had no statistically significant independent effect. The findings expand leader-member exchange theory by providing evidence that followers who are reliable, adaptable and capable, help to achieve positive outcomes for the firm. Employee attributes that enhance the ability to execute, innovate, ensure quality compliance, and respond to external pressures are vital for sustainable growth in a firm.

To embed employee development within growth strategies of horticultural export companies, they must pay special attention to competence, conscientious work practices and being open to innovation when recruiting, training, appraising and promoting employees. Export standards, training, digital systems, problem-solving, and adaptable working practices should be included in the professional development programmes of managers. Performance systems should reward precision, reliability, experimentation and initiative. Besides, leaders should enable staff autonomy, feedback, and inclusion in decision making regarding operations. Collaborative behaviour should be nurtured in conjunction with competence and accountability as it did not influence growth on its own. Lastly, longitudinal, multisource design would help to clarify and test the contextual influences and causality.

References

- Agnoli, S., Zenari, S., Mastria, S., & Corazza, G. E. (2021). How do you feel in virtual environments? The role of emotions and openness trait over creative performance. *Creativity: Theories–Research–Applications*, 8(1), 148–164.
- Altaf, S., Iqbal, M. Z., Van Prooijen, J. W., & Ikramullah, M. (2021). The mechanism behind employee agreeableness and group performance ratings: A Pakistani study. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 70(4), 743–768.
- Bauer, T. N., & Erdogan, B. (Eds.). (2015). *The Oxford handbook of leader-member exchange*. Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199326174.001.0001>
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bujang, M. A., Omar, E. D., Foo, D. H. P., & Hon, Y. K. (2024). Sample size determination for conducting a pilot study to assess reliability of a questionnaire. *Restorative Dentistry & Endodontics*, 49(1).

- Dansereau, F., Graen, G., & Haga, W. J. (1975). A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership within formal organizations: A longitudinal investigation of the role-making process. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 13(1), 46–78.
- Dar, N., Kundi, Y. M., & Soomro, S. A. (2023). Leader-member exchange and innovative work behavior: A 2–1–1 model. *Management Decision*, 61(9), 2629–2644. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-08-2022-1113>
- Fein, E. C., & Tziner, A. (2021). Editorial: The future of the leader-member exchange theory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 736710. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.736710>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2024a). *Trade of agricultural commodities 2010–2023*. <https://www.fao.org/statistics/highlights-archive/highlights-detail/trade-of-agricultural-commodities-2010-2023/>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2024b). *World food and agriculture: Statistical yearbook 2024*. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1329en>
- Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya. (2025, January 7). *Update on the state of the horticulture industry in Kenya 2020*. <https://fpeak.org/2021/01/07/update-on-the-state-of-the-horticulture-industry-in-kenya-2021/>
- Githiga, S. M., Elia, E., & Yasunobu, K. (2024). Enhancing competitiveness in Kenyan horticulture exports: A value chain approach. *African Development Review*, 36(1), 54–66.
- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange theory over 25 years: Applying a multi-level, multi-domain perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 219–247.
- Kanake, M. K., & Kemboi, A. (2020). Employee empowerment and innovative work behavior: The moderating role of leader-member exchange. *SEISENSE Journal of Management*, 3(5), 13–23. <https://doi.org/10.33215/sjom.v3i5.421>
- Kangai, E., & Gwademba, G. (2025). *Creating employment in horticulture sector in Kenya: Productivity, contracting and marketing policies* (Utafiti Sera Policy Brief No. 002). Utafiti Sera.
- Kariuki, J. W., Mbugua, J. K., Njuguna, S. G., & Wambugu, D. N. (2024). Drivers of horticultural export growth in Kenya: Opportunities and constraints. *Kenya Agricultural Research Journal*, 25(1), 88–105.
- Kenya Horticulture Council. (2023). *Annual report on the status of Kenya's horticultural exports*.
- Khattak, S. I., Khan, M. A., Ali, M. I., Khan, H. G. A., & Saeed, I. (2023). Relationship between servant leadership, leader-member exchange, organizational learning, and innovative work behavior: Evidence from high-tech firms. *SAGE Open*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231212267>
- Latifoglu, N., Imamoglu, S. Z., Ince, H., & Altindag, E. (2023). Effect of leader-member exchange on proactive employee behavior and employee performance: The moderating role of innovative climate. *Sustainability*, 15(20), Article 14670. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152014670>
- Liden, R. C., Sparrowe, R. T., & Wayne, S. J. (1997). Leader-member exchange theory: The past and potential for the future. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 15, 47–120.
- Ma, E., Qu, H., Wilson, M., & Eastman, C. (2023). Leader-member exchange, service innovation, and organizational growth: Evidence from the hospitality sector. *Tourism Management*, 91, Article 104478.

- Mwingirwa, M. K., Okello, D. J., Otinga, H. N., & Kitonga, D. (2024). Effect of compensation system on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. *ESI Preprints*, 30, 242–242.
- Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2025). *Fresh fruit and vegetables: Buyer requirements in Europe*. <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/fresh-fruit-vegetables/buyer-requirements>
- Ng’ethe, W. (2022). Trends and challenges in Kenya’s horticultural exports. *African Journal of Agricultural Economics and Development*, 10(2), 129–142.
- Njue, N. (2021). Influence of risk management practice on performance of micro small entrepreneurial projects in Nairobi City County, Kenya. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 8(1), 393–402.
- Nunoo, N. Y. A. S. (2022). *The role of personality traits in determining type of employment and job performance in Ghana* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Coast].
- Nzomoi, J. N., Mutua, J., Kiprop, H., & Kathambi, A. (2022). An economic analysis of Kenya’s horticulture export performance 2010–2021. *International Journal of Economics*, 7(1), 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijecon.1659>
- Nzumbi, L. (2023). *The role of personality traits on leaders’ and employees’ job performance in organizations* [Doctoral dissertation, Institute of Accountancy Arusha].
- Omilion-Hodges, L. M., & Ptacek, J. K. (2021). *Leader-member exchange and organizational communication: Facilitating a healthy work environment*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68756-4>
- Purbo S, G., & Genta, F. K. (2020). Agricultural extension performance reviewed from the perspective of competence, motivation, and work environment. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24, 12187–12194.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson.
- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2019). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (8th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Shrestha, N. (2021). Factor analysis as a tool for survey analysis. *American Journal of Applied Mathematics and Statistics*, 9(1), 4–11. <https://doi.org/10.12691/ajams-9-1-2>
- Tanaka, H. S., & Ishiyama, N. (2023). Effects of talent status and leader-member exchange on innovative work behaviour in talent management in Japan. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 29(4), 895–912. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602381.2023.2186623>
- Wardana, M. A., Sudarmawan, I. W. E., Wibowo, T. S., & Pandiangan, H. (2023). Analysis of organizational justice, competence, and work motivation to improve performance. *Jurnal Informatika Ekonomi Bisnis*, 5(2), 421–427.