

Employee Engagement and Quality of Work Life in Health Facilities: Evidence from Machakos County Government, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of employee engagement on Quality of Work Life (QWL) among healthcare workers in public health facilities in Machakos County, Kenya. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted, with data collected from 195 healthcare workers using structured questionnaires measured on a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and ordinal logistic regression. Findings revealed moderate to high levels of employee engagement ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.10$), with significant differences across professional cadres ($F(3,191) = 6.45$, $p < .001$). Ordinal regression results indicated that employee engagement significantly predicts QWL ($OR = 1.72$, $p < .001$), implying that higher engagement substantially increases the likelihood of improved work-life quality. The study concludes that employee engagement is a critical driver of employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. It recommends strengthening participatory leadership, communication, recognition systems, and teamwork to enhance QWL and service delivery in public health facilities.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Quality of Work Life, Human Resource Management, Public Health, Employee Well-being, Machakos County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is defined as the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment of employees to their organization (Saks, 2019). Engaged employees demonstrate higher productivity, improved job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive behaviors (Na-Nan et al., 2021). In public health systems, particularly within devolved governance structures like Machakos County, employee engagement plays a pivotal role in addressing workforce challenges such as high turnover, low morale, absenteeism, and reduced service quality (Mutinda et al., 2023).

Despite the growing global interest in employee engagement, Kenyan county health systems often face challenges including limited participation in decision-making, inadequate communication channels, and insufficient recognition mechanisms. These challenges adversely impact employees' Quality of Work Life (QWL), which encompasses job satisfaction, well-being, work-life balance, and organizational support (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). Understanding the engagement-QWL relationship is thus critical for informing human resource management policies and improving public health service delivery.

This study is further grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that employees reciprocate organizational support with positive attitudes and behaviors such as engagement (Omar, 2025). When employees perceive fairness, recognition, and support, they are more likely to exhibit higher engagement and improved Quality of Work Life

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) proposed by Lofquist and Dawis (1984). TWA posits that employee satisfaction and performance are outcomes of the correspondence between individual needs

and the work environment. Employees who perceive that their contributions are recognized, their needs are met, and their work aligns with personal and professional goals exhibit higher engagement and QWL (Kusuma & Rahyuda, 2021).

Engagement activities such as participatory decision-making, clear communication, recognition, and teamwork facilitate alignment between employee expectations and organizational provisions, enhancing job satisfaction and overall well-being (Rubel et al., 2023).

In addition to the Theory of Work Adjustment, this study integrates Social Exchange Theory (SET), which explains how reciprocal relationships between employees and organizations influence engagement outcomes. Engagement arises when employees perceive organizational investments such as recognition, communication, and participation, leading to improved well-being and QWL (Omar, 2025).

Problem statement

Despite increasing global recognition of employee engagement as a critical driver of organizational performance and employee well-being, public health systems particularly in devolved governance contexts continue to face persistent workforce challenges. In Kenya, county health facilities operate under complex conditions characterized by high patient demand, resource constraints, and workforce shortages, all of which place significant pressure on healthcare workers (Mutinda et al., 2023). These conditions have been associated with reduced job satisfaction, burnout, and declining Quality of Work Life (QWL), ultimately affecting service delivery outcomes.

Within Machakos County, emerging evidence indicates that healthcare workers experience limited participation in decision-making, inadequate communication channels, insufficient recognition of performance, and weak support systems for work-life balance (Mutinda et al., 2023). These challenges undermine employee motivation, reduce organizational commitment, and negatively influence overall well-being. While various human resource interventions have been implemented to address workforce issues, their effectiveness has remained inconsistent, partly due to insufficient emphasis on employee engagement as a strategic mechanism for improving QWL.

Although existing studies have established a positive relationship between employee engagement and organizational outcomes such as performance and retention (Saks, 2019; Na-Nan et al., 2021), there is limited empirical evidence examining how specific engagement dimensions such as participation, communication, recognition, and teamwork influence Quality of Work Life within county-level public health systems in Kenya. Most studies have focused on general organizational settings or private sector contexts, leaving a significant contextual and empirical gap in understanding engagement dynamics within devolved healthcare systems.

Failure to address these challenges may result in continued deterioration of employee well-being, increased turnover intentions, and compromised quality of healthcare services. Given the critical role of healthcare workers in achieving universal health coverage and improving public health outcomes, there is an urgent need to examine how employee engagement influences Quality of Work Life within this context.

Research Objective

General Objective:

To determine the influence of employee engagement on employee Quality of Work Life in health facilities within Machakos County Government.

Specific Objectives:

1. To assess the relationship between participatory management and QWL.
2. To examine the effect of communication on QWL.
3. To evaluate the influence of recognition and team cohesion on QWL.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement has consistently been associated with higher job satisfaction, commitment, and organizational performance (Saks, 2019; Rabie & Elliyana, 2019; McCarthy et al., 2020; Alemu & Sorsa, 2024).

Engagement mechanisms such as participation in decision-making, effective communication, recognition, and teamwork have been shown to enhance employees’ sense of belonging, autonomy, and well-being (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012; Na-Nan et al., 2021; Maryani et al., 2023).

Participation and Communication: Studies indicate that participatory management practices and open communication channels positively influence engagement, leading to improved job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012; Maksonsong & Thaweepaiboonwong, 2024).

Recognition and Teamwork: Recognition of employees’ efforts and fostering teamwork are also key drivers of engagement and well-being, as they enhance self-efficacy, motivation, and social support at work (Na-Nan et al., 2021; Yasmin & Rahmawati, 2025).

Link Engagement → Outcomes: Employee engagement has been shown to significantly influence organizational performance, employee retention, and service quality (McCarthy et al., 2020; Alemu & Sorsa, 2024).

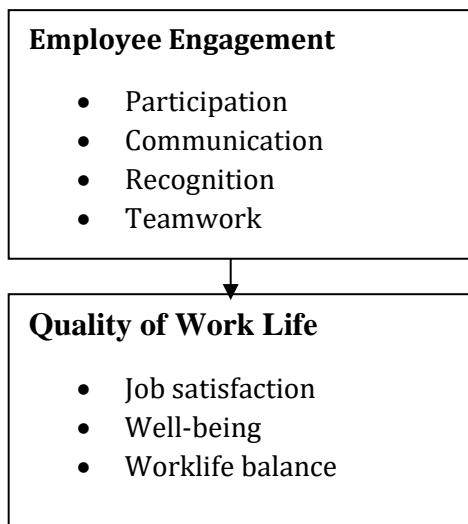
Healthcare Context: In healthcare settings, employee engagement is particularly critical due to high job demands, emotional labour, and resource constraints, which directly affect both employee well-being and patient outcomes (Albar et al., 2025; Ahmad, 2024).

Kenyan Evidence: Studies in Kenya indicate that engagement is influenced by leadership, rewards, and career development opportunities, all of which significantly impact employee satisfaction and performance in health institutions (Mutinda et al., 2023).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study conceptualizes **employee engagement** as the independent variable, represented by participatory management, communication, recognition, and teamwork. The **dependent variable**, Quality of Work Life, is represented by job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance.

Independent Variable



Dependent variable

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the study

METHODOLOGY

A **cross-sectional survey design** was adopted to examine the relationship between employee engagement and QWL among healthcare workers in Machakos County. The target population comprised 195 healthcare workers across various cadres: nurses, clinical officers, medical officers, and medical superintendents.

Data Collection: Structured questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data on engagement practices and QWL indicators.

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using SPSS, employing ordinal logistic regression to determine the strength, direction, and statistical significance of the relationship between employee engagement and QWL.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was strictly maintained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

This study sought to examine the influence of employee engagement on Quality of Work Life (QWL) among healthcare workers in Machakos County Government. The empirical findings reveal that employee engagement significantly predicts QWL, with an odds ratio of 1.72 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that increased engagement substantially enhances the likelihood of improved work-life quality. This finding confirms the central premise of the study that engagement is not merely an organizational outcome but a strategic driver of employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Descriptive results further indicate that employee engagement levels were moderately high ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.10$), suggesting that healthcare workers in Machakos County exhibit a reasonably positive connection with their work and organizational environment. However, variations across engagement dimensions were observed, with teamwork scoring highest ($M = 3.95$) and recognition scoring relatively lower ($M = 3.70$). These findings provide important insights into the strengths and weaknesses of engagement practices within the county health system.

The results are consistent with contemporary research indicating that employee engagement and QWL are closely interconnected constructs that reinforce each other. For instance, studies show that improving QWL enhances employees' emotional and cognitive attachment to their work, thereby increasing engagement levels (Albar et al., 2025). Conversely, low QWL is associated with reduced engagement, increased turnover, and diminished organizational performance.

DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis of Key Variables

The descriptive statistics reveal important patterns regarding employee engagement and QWL among healthcare workers. The overall mean score for employee engagement ($M = 3.82$) indicates a moderate to high level of engagement, suggesting that most employees perceive a reasonable level of support, involvement, and connection to their work.

Among the dimensions of engagement, teamwork emerged as the strongest component, with a mean score of 3.95. This suggests that collaborative practices are relatively well established within the health facilities. Strong teamwork is particularly important in healthcare settings, where coordinated efforts among professionals are essential for effective service delivery. Existing literature supports this finding, emphasizing that teamwork enhances communication, reduces errors, and improves both employee well-being and patient outcomes (Nan et al., 2021; Ahmad, 2024).

Communication also recorded relatively high scores ($M = 3.80$), indicating that information sharing and interaction among staff are fairly effective. Effective communication is a critical component of employee engagement, as it fosters trust, clarity, and alignment with organizational goals. Research has shown that open communication channels contribute significantly to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, particularly in complex environments such as healthcare systems.

In contrast, recognition ($M = 3.70$) and participation ($M = 3.75$) scored relatively lower, suggesting that employees may not feel sufficiently acknowledged or involved in decision-making processes. This is a critical

finding, as recognition and participation are key drivers of intrinsic motivation and engagement. Studies indicate that employees who feel valued and involved are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment and well-being (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012; Maryani et al., 2023).

Quality of Work Life ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.08$) was also rated moderately high, indicating that employees generally experience a reasonable level of job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance. However, the moderate nature of these scores suggests that there is still significant room for improvement.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables (N = 195)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Employee Engagement	3.82	1.10	Moderate–High
Participation	3.75	1.12	Moderate
Communication	3.80	1.05	Moderate–High
Recognition	3.70	1.18	Moderate
Teamwork	3.95	1.02	High
Quality of Work Life	3.85	1.08	Moderate–High

Interpretation

The results indicate that teamwork and communication scored relatively higher compared to recognition and participation. This suggests that while collaborative practices are relatively well established, formal recognition systems and participatory decision-making remain weak areas within the Machakos County health system.

INFERENCE STATISTICS

Inferential Analysis: Employee Engagement and QWL

The ordinal logistic regression analysis provides strong evidence of the relationship between employee engagement and QWL. The overall odds ratio of 1.72 indicates that a one-unit increase in employee engagement leads to a 72% increase in the likelihood of improved QWL, holding other factors constant. This finding demonstrates a robust and statistically significant relationship between engagement and employee well-being.

Further analysis of individual predictors reveals that all dimensions of engagement participation, communication, recognition, and teamwork have significant positive effects on QWL. Among these, teamwork emerged as the strongest predictor ($OR = 1.75$), followed closely by recognition ($OR = 1.70$), communication ($OR = 1.68$), and participation ($OR = 1.65$).

These findings align with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that job resources such as support, recognition, and collaboration enhance employee motivation and well-being while mitigating the negative effects of job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In healthcare settings, where employees face high levels of stress, workload, and emotional demands, the availability of such resources is particularly critical. Evidence shows that poor work environments characterized by high stress and limited support significantly reduce job satisfaction and QWL among healthcare professionals.

Table 2: Ordinal Logistic Regression Results

Predictor Variable	Odds Ratio (OR)	p-value	Interpretation
Employee Engagement	1.72	<0.001	Significant positive effect
Participation	1.65	<0.01	Significant
Communication	1.68	<0.01	Significant
Recognition	1.70	<0.01	Significant
Teamwork	1.75	<0.001	Strongest predictor

Interpretation

The odds ratio (OR = 1.72) indicates that a one-unit increase in employee engagement increases the likelihood of improved QWL by **72%**, holding other factors constant. This demonstrates a strong and meaningful relationship between engagement and employee well-being.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

Employee Engagement as a Predictor of Quality of Work Life

The findings of this study confirm that employee engagement is a significant predictor of Quality of Work Life among healthcare workers. This result is consistent with a large body of empirical literature demonstrating that engaged employees experience higher levels of job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and organizational commitment (Kusuma & Rahyuda, 2021; Rubel et al., 2023; Chatterjee et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this finding strongly supports Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that employees reciprocate favorable organizational treatment with positive attitudes and behaviors (Omar, 2025). When healthcare workers perceive that their organization values their contributions and supports their needs, they are more likely to respond with increased engagement, which in turn enhances their work-life quality.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), which emphasizes the importance of alignment between employee needs and organizational provisions. When employees experience a good fit between their expectations and the work environment, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of satisfaction and engagement.

Role of Participation and Communication

Participation and communication emerged as significant predictors of QWL, highlighting their importance in fostering employee engagement. Participatory management practices enable employees to contribute to decision-making processes, thereby enhancing their sense of ownership and control over their work. This is particularly important in healthcare settings, where frontline workers often possess valuable insights into service delivery challenges.

Effective communication, on the other hand, ensures that employees are well-informed about organizational goals, policies, and expectations. It also facilitates feedback, which is essential for continuous improvement and performance management. Research indicates that transparent communication fosters trust and reduces uncertainty, thereby enhancing employee well-being and engagement (Maksonsong & Thaweepaiboonwong, 2024).

Recognition and Teamwork as Key Drivers

Recognition and teamwork were identified as strong predictors of QWL, with teamwork emerging as the most influential factor. This finding underscores the importance of social and psychological support in the workplace. Recognition fulfills employees' intrinsic needs for appreciation and self-worth, while teamwork fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support.

In healthcare environments, where work is often stressful and emotionally demanding, the presence of supportive colleagues and recognition from supervisors can significantly enhance employees' resilience and well-being. Studies confirm that supportive work environments characterized by recognition and collaboration lead to higher levels of engagement and reduced stress.

Variations across Professional Cadres

The study also found significant differences in engagement levels across professional cadres. Nurses reported relatively lower engagement compared to medical officers and supervisors. This variation can be attributed to differences in job roles, responsibilities, and working conditions.

Nurses often experience higher workloads, emotional strain, and limited autonomy, which can negatively affect their engagement and QWL. Research shows that factors such as workload, fatigue, and lack of management support are major contributors to low job satisfaction among healthcare workers. In contrast, medical officers typically enjoy greater autonomy and decision-making authority, which may enhance their engagement levels.

These findings highlight the need for targeted human resource interventions that address the specific needs of different professional groups rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Integration with Human Resource Management Practices

The findings of this study demonstrate that employee engagement operates within a broader human resource management (HRM) system. Engagement is influenced by various HR practices, including training and development, reward systems, and performance management.

For instance, training enhances employees' skills and competence, thereby increasing their confidence and engagement. Similarly, reward systems motivate employees by recognizing their contributions, while performance management provides clear goals and feedback. Research indicates that integrating these HR practices creates a supportive work environment that enhances both engagement and QWL (Aysila & Kusmaryani, 2025; Albar et al., 2025).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS

The findings of this study have significant implications for public health systems, particularly within devolved governance structures such as county governments in Kenya.

First, enhancing employee engagement can lead to improved service delivery. Engaged employees are more productive, motivated, and patient-centered, which directly contributes to better healthcare outcomes. Given the critical role of healthcare workers in service delivery, improving their engagement and well-being should be a strategic priority.

Second, improving QWL can help address the challenge of employee retention. High turnover rates and brain drain are major concerns in Kenya's health sector. By creating a supportive work environment that enhances QWL, county governments can retain skilled healthcare workers and reduce recruitment and training costs.

Third, the findings highlight the need for policy interventions that institutionalize employee engagement practices. County governments should develop and implement HR policies that promote participation, communication, recognition, and teamwork. These policies should be aligned with broader public service reforms aimed at improving efficiency and accountability.

CONCLUSION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In summary, the results of this study provide strong empirical evidence that employee engagement is a critical determinant of Quality of Work Life among healthcare workers in Machakos County. The findings demonstrate that engagement practices such as participation, communication, recognition, and teamwork significantly enhance employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

The study contributes to the existing literature by providing context-specific evidence from a devolved public health system in Kenya. It also highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to human resource management that integrates engagement strategies with broader organizational practices.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for public sector organizations to prioritize employee engagement as a key driver of performance, well-being, and service delivery.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights generated by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the study adopted a cross-sectional research design, which captures data at a

single point in time. While this design is appropriate for examining relationships between variables, it limits the ability to establish causal inferences between employee engagement and Quality of Work Life (QWL). As such, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of associations rather than definitive cause-and-effect relationships.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through structured questionnaires. Although this approach is widely used in organizational research, it is subject to potential biases such as social desirability bias, recall bias, and subjective interpretation of survey items. Respondents may have provided responses that reflect perceived expectations rather than their actual experiences, which could influence the accuracy of the results .

Third, the study was conducted within public health facilities in Machakos County, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other counties or healthcare systems with different organizational structures, resource levels, and workforce dynamics. Context-specific factors such as leadership styles, institutional policies, and regional socio-economic conditions may influence employee engagement and QWL differently across settings. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying these findings beyond the study context.

Fourth, although the sample size of 195 respondents was adequate for statistical analysis, it may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across all healthcare cadres and facilities. Variations in workload, job roles, and organizational support systems may not have been exhaustively represented, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of the findings. Research indicates that sample size and representativeness can influence the reliability and generalizability of study outcomes .

Finally, the study focused primarily on selected dimensions of employee engagement namely participation, communication, recognition, and teamwork while other relevant factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, compensation, and career development opportunities were not explicitly examined. This may limit the scope of the findings, as employee engagement is a multidimensional construct influenced by a broader range of organizational and individual factors.

Despite these limitations, the study provides important empirical insights into the relationship between employee engagement and Quality of Work Life within a devolved public health system. The identified limitations also offer valuable directions for future research, including the adoption of longitudinal designs, expansion to multiple counties, and inclusion of additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee engagement dynamics.

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