

Onboarding Practice and Employee Performance in County Governments in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at establishing the influence of onboarding practice on employee performance in County Governments in Kenya. It was anchored on Communication Accommodation Theory. It employed a descriptive design. The target population for this study was 4631 employees in 9 selected counties. Using statistical formulae, a sample of 369 employees was obtained which was allocated proportionately. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used on the sample obtained across county departments. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect primary data from the respondents. Prior to data collection, the data collection instrument was piloted on 37 respondents (10% of sample size) from Nyandarua, Kericho and Nyamira Counties who did not participate in the actual study. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, supported by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results of the survey were presented in tables. The study established that onboarding practice had weak and positive correlation with employee performance. The study concluded that onboarding practice was found to be significant predictors of employee performance. The study recommends the need for County Governments to benchmark with industry best practices, thereby aligning their staff needs to changing industry needs. In addition, they need to restructure their communication mechanism to enhance onboarding process and continuously encourage use of onboarding teams for easier, quicker employee-focused onboarding process.

Keywords: Onboarding Practice, Employee Performance, Benchmark

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance has emerged as a central pillar in many organizations because of its influence on all the aspects of the organization, more so the overall performance of the organization. The results any organization sets out to achieve are realized through employee performance (Suprpto & Maharani, 2021). The ever-increasing many an employer's quest to continuously raise organization performance levels through employee performance justifies the need to continuously improve employees' capabilities to enable the organization to gain competitive edge in every competitive sphere in today's globalized organizations (Ganguly and Sharma, 2023). Employee performance therefore plays a critical role in ensuring governance objectives such as those based on devolved human resource function are ultimately met (Arale and Kiruthu, 2019). Employee performance therefore emerges as the vehicle that enables organisations, including the public sector, to move from its current state to its preferred future.

Statement of the problem

Devolution of human resource as enshrined in the constitution of Kenya 2010 was to help in bringing government services nearer to residents, increases straightforwardness and empowers local citizens to closely monitor

government activities. However, the realization and accomplishment of their objectives depends solely on the effectiveness and efficiency of their human resources. Therefore, performance of their employees is a key component for any county that seeks to thrive. In order to enhance employee performance, counties must put in place measures to build their human resource capacities. This brings building and managing HR capacity to the forefront when addressing employee performance gaps. However, county governments in Kenya have been experiencing various service delivery challenges which have led to inefficiencies, poor service delivery, high turnover, rampant corruption and massive losses (Osman & Bula, 2022). According to the Office of the Auditor General report 2021/2022, counties have numerous cases of lack of accountability, poor management, lack of staff inventories, irregular promotions and recruitment of staff, poor compensation schemes, undocumented workers among others which have impacted negatively on staff performance and thus affected service delivery. Furthermore, according to the World Bank (2020), 55% of employees absorbed from local government lack the requisite skills and capacity to tackle emerging challenges, over 40% of all county employees require enhanced capacity building and majority require re-orientation on work attitudes. Furthermore, According Nyaguthii (2022), various departments lack clear enforceable standards leading to disagreements between teams, hence hampering employee performance. Onboarding practice offers viable solutions to these challenges. An effective onboarding strategy presents a great chance to increase employee engagement by fostering a positive working relationship between new employees and management, reaffirming the organisation's dedication to supporting employees' professional development, and demonstrating to staff that management values their skills (Rachel & Onyeorikorikiye, 2024). However, there is little or no evidence in literature indicating studies that have focused specifically on onboarding practice and employee performance. Given the importance of county governments in enhancing devolution outcomes and improved service delivery, it would be prudent to understand this relationship. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) which was developed in 1971 by Howard Giles and it examines the underlying motivations and consequences of two speakers when they shift their communication styles in order to accommodate one another (Hadley, Naylor & Hamilton, 2022). This can be done in two ways, which are divergence and convergence. Divergence refers to speakers with strong ethnic or racial pride that highlight their distinctiveness; whereas convergence refers to strong need for social approval. CAT becomes extremely crucial as it can influence how employees see the organization and its members. Firms must ensure current employees to use convergence form of speech to make the new hires understand and feel welcome by altering their speech by avoiding technical terms and jargons that may confuse new employees. Moreover, managers and coworkers in the same departments needs to follow convergence form of speech during the onboarding process until the new hires are imbedded into the culture of the organization (Hadley et al., 2022). Practicing divergence in the workplace fosters group distinctiveness and creates an atmosphere separate to other departments that can allow new hire to freely work and create new ideas. Divergent form of thinking is paramount for establishing close relationships in groups. CAT therefore can be used to explain onboarding as this theory helps managers to understand the nature of some of the workplace conflicts that occur as they are likely to be caused by disagreement between the different groups in the organization. The theory however has a number of limitations, including: that all organizations have well-defined communication systems, that communication channels in all organization are well-understood and that there exists a seamless communication protocol between employees and top management.

Empirical Review

A number of studies have examined onboarding and employee performance with mixed findings. For example, Tomcikova and Coculova (2020) manpower capacity management in Slovakia aimed at defining the basic concept related to the acquisition, management and development of manpower capacity at a theoretical level. Their study found that there exist differences in the perception of the importance of individual determinants of the ability of a company to attract manpower capacity employees from among top, middle and lower management. Furthermore, they found that attracting the right of employees is not sufficient to enhance

employee performance; other relevant processes that orient, induct and place these employees in the right jobs, with right teams and with the right leadership structures are important in enhancing performance. They concluded that firms should optimize their human resources to align onboarding processes to all organizational initiatives.

Similarly, Okonkwo (2022) examined capacity building and employee performance in plastic manufacturing companies in Anambra State, Nigeria using a survey design targeting 180 employees. The study collected data using both open and closed ended questionnaires. Their study established that employee orientation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. Similarly, coaching had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. Finally, they found that job rotation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. The author concluded that capacity building seen in terms of orientation, coaching and job rotation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. The author therefore recommended that employee orientation should be done in a conducive environment with all the necessary facilities and refreshment package to motivate employees and enhance their individual capacities.

Nyaribo (2024) investigated the effect of new employee onboarding practices on employee performance at Sub-County Hospitals in Kisii County, Kenya. Their study employed a quantitative survey design and targeted 222 respondents using structured questionnaires. The authors revealed that employee orientation, employee mentoring and employee follow-up evaluation plan positively influenced employee performance. However, they revealed that employee coaching had statistically insignificant effect on employee performance. The therefore recommended the need for county governments to provide adequate resources to facilitate the implementation of new staff coaching.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was adopted in this study. The target population was 4631 employees of 9 county governments in Kenya, namely: Makueni, Siaya, Baringo, Mombasa, Kakamega, Laikipia, Murang'a, Isiolo and Trans-Nzoia counties. A sample of 369 respondents was obtained, which was allocated proportionately. The study employed probabilistic approaches using mixed sampling techniques. Firstly, proportionate sampling was used to allocate the samples across counties. Secondly, simple random sampling was used to target the respondents in each of the 9 counties. Lastly, the researcher attempted to spread the random sample across county departments. Questionnaires, which consisted of close-ended questions, were used to collect primary data. Prior to data collection, the researcher piloted the study in 3 counties, namely: Nyandarua, Kericho and Nyamira counties using 37 respondents which was 10% of the target sample; and did not take part in the actual study. In addition, the researcher sought clearance from the university, National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and county Human Resource departments in each of the 9 counties. Thereafter, the researcher administered the questionnaire, while assuring the respondents of confidentiality. Finally, the data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23; after which Tables were used to present the findings.

FINDINGS

The researcher administered 369 questionnaires to all the respondents and 312 questionnaires were returned. 286 returned questionnaires were properly filled which represented 77.5%. This was above 70% which Sekaran and Bougie (2016) describe as excellent.

Descriptive Statistics for Onboarding Practice

From the descriptive findings for onboarding practice (Table 1), the respondents agreed with the statements that their counties had a well-designed and documented orientation plan for all employees (67.1%) and that the orientation was usually undertaken with a structured plan and catered for all the departments (60.8%). The findings implied that counties had documented plans for orienting all their new employees and that orientation was an activity undertaken across all county departments.

Furthermore, the respondents agreed with the statements that they also had a talent identification scheme that was known to all employees (44.4%) and that their county managers focused on retaining all identified talented staff (46.5%). The findings implied that counties undertook talent identification of some sort and that counties had internal mechanisms established to retain the talented staff. Similarly, the respondents agreed with the statements that counties had an open and clear communication channel between all cadres of employees (67.8%) and that all communication in the county on orientation was formal and was made available to all employees (58.8%).

The findings on communication suggested that most counties have well-structured communication plans which were open, clear and formal and addressed all the orientation needs for new employees. Furthermore, the respondents agreed with the statements that orientation schemes were usually undertaken by known team leaders in each department (65.7%) and that their county deliberately formed teams to undertake orientation for all employees (61.6%).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Onboarding Practice

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std Dev
Our county has a well-designed and documented orientation plan for all employees	5.9	10.5	16.4	38.1	29	3.74	1.160
Orientation is usually undertaken with a structured plan and caters for all the departments	7	12.9	19.2	40.2	20.6	3.55	1.159
We also have a talent identification scheme that is known to all employees	16.4	21.7	17.5	29.7	14.7	3.05	1.328
Our county managers focus on retaining all identified talented staff	14	14.7	24.8	26.2	20.3	3.24	1.314
We also have an open and clear communication channel between all cadres of employees	3.8	10.5	17.8	44.4	23.4	3.73	1.053
All communication in the county on orientation is formal and is made available to all employees	2.4	9.4	29.4	35.7	23.1	3.67	1.010
Orientation schemes are usually undertaken by known team leaders in each department	4.2	11.5	18.5	38.1	27.6	3.73	1.111
Our county deliberately forms teams to undertake orientation for all employees	6.3	15.4	16.8	38.5	23.1	3.57	1.182
Grand Mean						3.54	1.165

The findings on teams and the role of team leaders in the orientation schemes is of particular importance as it indicates the deliberate approach taken by counties in ensuring that the employee onboarding process is smooth and successful. The findings agree with those of Tomcikova and Coculova (2020) who found that attracting the right kind of employees is not sufficient to enhance employee performance; other relevant processes that orient, induct and place these employees in the right jobs, with right teams and with the right leadership structures are important in enhancing performance. They concluded that firms should optimize their human resources to align

onboarding processes to all organizational initiatives. Similarly, Okonkwo (2022) established that employee orientation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance and that coaching had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. Finally, they found that job rotation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. The author concluded that capacity building seen in terms of orientation, coaching and job rotation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance.

Descriptive Statistics for Employee Performance

From the descriptive findings for employee performance, the respondents agreed with the statements that they normally started and completed all work targets according to the set timelines (88.1%) and that they consistently met all short-term and long-term work targets (77.7%) as shown in Table 2. The findings on timelines and meeting of targets implied that county government employees assessed their performance positively. Furthermore, the respondents agreed with the statements that they had a low annual level of absenteeism from work duties (87.5%) and that they always ensured that work outputs met the quality standards set by management (90.2%). The findings on low absenteeism and output meeting set quality standards implied that employees to some extent feel that absenteeism from work was minimum and that their outputs met management standards. Similarly, the respondents agreed with the statements that they also ensured that they complied with rules and regulations set by management (94.4%) and that they often delivered standard work outputs (91.7%). The findings on compliance to rules and regulations set by management suggested that employee discipline is fairly high amongst county government employees. Similarly, the findings on delivery of standard work outputs implied that employees rated themselves highly on their performance outputs.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Employee Performance

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std Dev
I normally start and complete all my work targets according to the set timelines	0	0	11.9	35.7	52.4	4.41	0.693
I consistently meet all my short-term and long-term work targets	0	4.2	18.2	42.7	35	4.08	0.833
I have a low annual level of absenteeism from my work duties	0	3.8	8.7	38.5	49	4.33	0.792
I always ensure that my work outputs meet the quality standards set by management	0	2.4	7.3	40.2	50	4.38	0.728
I also ensure that I comply with rules and regulations set by management	1.4	1.4	2.8	33.2	61.2	4.51	0.748
I often deliver standard work outputs	0	1.7	6.6	44.8	46.9	4.37	0.687
In undertaking my work, I ensure prudent use of all county resources at my disposal	0	4.2	7.7	31.1	57	4.41	0.806
Grand Mean						4.36	0.755

Furthermore, the respondents agreed with the statement that in undertaking their work, they ensured prudent use of all county resources at their disposal (88.1%). The findings on the prudent use of county government resources at the disposal of employees implied that on average county resources were prudently utilized viewed from employee perspectives.

Correlation Analysis for Onboarding Practice and Employee Performance

The study undertook to establish the correlation between onboarding practice and employee performance. The Pearson's correlation results of onboarding practice and employee performance in county governments in Kenya are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Onboarding Practice and Employee Performance

		Onboarding Practice
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	.260**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	286

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation results show that onboarding practice ($r=.260$, $p=.000$) had a weak and positive correlation with employee performance in county governments in Kenya. This finding implies that an increase in the level of onboarding practice in county governments in Kenya would lead to an increase in the level of employee performance. These findings concur with Nyaribo (2024) who found that employee orientation, mentoring and follow-up evaluation plan positively influenced employee performance in sub-County Hospitals in Kisii County. This implies that onboarding practice is not an exclusive factor in predicting employee performance County governments in Kenya due to inadequate resources.

Regression Analysis for Onboarding Practice and Employee Performance

In this study, a univariate regression between employee performance and onboarding practice was undertaken and the model summary findings are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Model Summary

Indicator	Coefficient
R	.260
R Square	.068
Adjusted R Square	.065
Standard Error of the Estimate	.50924

From the findings in Table 4 above, the R-square value of 0.068 indicates that onboarding practice explains 6.8% of variation in employee performance in county governments in Kenya. Table 5 shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) findings.

Table 5: ANOVA: Onboarding Practice and Employee Performance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.359	1	5.359	20.663	.000 ^b
	Residual	73.650	284	.259		

	Total	79.008	285			
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a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Onboarding Practice

The findings of ANOVA of Onboarding Practice and Employee Performance indicated a statistically significant model ($F= 20.663$, $p=.000$). The findings on the regression coefficients are presented in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.837	.118		32.59	.000
	Onboarding Practice	.146	.032	.260	4.546	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

From the findings in Table above, it was established that onboarding practice significantly influenced employee performance ($B=.146$, $p=.000$). This implied that one-unit increase in the level of onboarding practice would lead to an increase of 0.146 units in employee performance. Further, using the regression coefficients in Table 6, the following specific model was developed as:

$$\text{Employee Performance} = 3.837 + 0.146 \text{ Onboarding Practice}$$

Hypothesis Testing for Onboarding Practice and Employee Performance

In order to ascertain the correlation between onboarding practice and employee performance, the study undertook hypothesis testing on the null hypothesis: H_0 : Onboarding practice has no significant influence on employee performance in county governments in Kenya. From the findings of regression coefficients in the table 6, it was found that the calculated t-value= 4.546 and p-value=.000<.05 and thus the null hypothesis was rejected. The study therefore concluded that onboarding practice has a statistically significant influence on employee performance in county governments in Kenya. The findings agree with those of Tomcikova and Coculova (2020) who found that relevant processes that orient, induct and place these employees in the right jobs, with right teams and with the right leadership structures are important in enhancing performance. Similar findings were reported by Okonkwo (2022) established that employee orientation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance and that coaching had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. The author further suggested that capacity building seen in terms of orientation, coaching and job rotation had a significant positive relationship with employee performance.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that onboarding practice had a weak and positive correlation with employee performance in county governments in Kenya. Also, onboarding practice was a significant predictor of employee performance. The weak correlation implies that county governments have not fully implement the available onboarding policies and practices at their disposal. County governments had orientation plans which were well structured, documented and were known to all employees, which influenced the performance of their employees. In addition, they had mechanisms for talent identification and retention of talented employees, which influenced the performance of their employees. Further, county governments had open, clear and well-structured communication systems that enhanced employee interaction and thus influenced the performance of their employees. Finally, county governments had team leaders in various county departments who guided and oversaw the onboarding process and therefore, positively influenced the performance of their employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the need for county governments to further explore orientation mechanisms that are not only well structured, documented and known but also those which are time-bound and encourage coaching, job rotation and mentoring of new employees. The county governments should benchmark their talent identification and retention schemes with industry best practices, thereby aligning their staff needs to dynamic industry needs and therefore, address challenges of employee turnover. The county governments should also restructure their communication mechanism especially those related to onboarding practices so as to enhance the onboarding process and therefore enable quicker adjustment of new employees joining the various county departments. Finally, county governments should continuously encourage the use of teams and the establishment of onboarding teams, which can be created in a cross-cutting manner across various departments and expertise; and therefore enable enhanced employee-focused onboarding process.

The study used questionnaires to collect primary data and therefore, future studies should incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews to provide richer insights into employee experiences with onboarding practices.

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