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**THE ROLE OF TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: A CASE OF THE COUNTY  
PUBLIC SERVICE OF NAROK, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** Transactional leadership has over the years elicited debates regarding its influence on organizational change. Whereas in some cases it is seen from a negative side, there are, however other scholars who view this kind of leadership from a positive dimension in terms of managing organizational change. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to find out the role of transactional leadership on organizational change in Narok County Public Service.

**Research methodology:** The study used descriptive research design. The study population consisted of the workers in the Public Service of Narok. The sample size comprised of 155 workers from six departments of the county government. The study employed questionnaires to collect primary data. Analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative analysis involved feeding the responses into the computer software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Qualitative analysis, on the other hand involved grouping the data in accordance with the set out objectives and presenting it using thematic analysis in form of narrative and prose.

**Findings:** The findings of the study revealed that the transactional leadership style that entailed promotions, demotions, goal setting and restructuring to a large extent played a big role in organizational change. However, it was also found that this type of leadership also creates fear and

apathy in employees, especially the use of punishments in enhancing compliance and this negatively affected organizational change.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends that county governments ought to have in place elaborated leadership styles which are tried and tested in other organizations. At the same time, the study recommends the borrowing of best practices by county governments.

**Keywords:** *Transactional Leadership, Organization change, Public service, Narok County*

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Lowe, Kroeck and Sivasubramaniam, (1996), transactional leadership refers to the approach that is result driven, goal-oriented and grounded on the results rather than the process. It hinges on task accomplishment and it sometimes entails a level of authoritarianism. In this style, leaders employ rewards and punishments in equal measure. These types of leaders prescribe and threaten employees depending on whether they are aligning themselves to what the leaders want or not. These leaders are often after moving the organization towards one purpose or goal and whoever deviates or has a contrary opinion is dealt with administratively. Lowe *et al.* (1996) indicated that style of leadership helps in achieving organizational objectives and performance. Čater, Lang and Szabo (2013) posit that Organizational change is influenced by the leadership style that the organization adopts. Therefore, the leadership style is dependent on having traits that are unique such as one's religion, values as well as beliefs. When it comes to individual organizations, differences can be manifested in terms of the unique traits, cultures and attitudes of individuals in the organization and all this has an impact on the leadership offered in the particular (Kezar & Lester, 2010). As indicated by Zahid *et al.* (2012) the leadership styles embraced are dependent upon convictions, standards, thoughts and estimations of the association. Transactional leadership is that in which the leader uses inducements and punishments to keep the employees on track and attaining organizational objectives (Limbare, 2012).

Societies that are characterized by high productivity often have a hybrid system of styles of leadership; for example, in Japan, all the leadership styles such as avoidance, transactional as well as transformational leadership styles are often employed in order to achieve ends of an organization. Similarly, these styles have received attention in countries such as Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, China, Germany Japan, Spain, Ireland, Israel and Italy (Felfe & Heinitz, 2010). For example, the culture in Japan is based on respect and obedience; as such, the manager

or leader in Japanese organizations aims to achieve or model a system which aims at not only enhancing strong bonds among the employees, but also harmony between the supervisors and the subordinates. As such, they try so hard to be able to be as consultative and comprehensive as possible in terms of decision making. This makes decisions to be democratic and acceptable to the entire organization. Yukl (2010) posits that in this system, leaders strive to be as fair as possible and as such, there is more agreement in decision making, a thing which enhances collective responsibility in an organization. In South Korea, Yukl (2020) connotes that the leadership style that is most common is that which stresses the importance of obedience and respect to authority at the same time laying emphasis on the leaders to be aware and abreast of the well-being of their juniors.

According to Jackson (2008), there are several similarities that can be derived at when one looks at the leadership styles across African countries; these include: role of morals in leadership, sharing, compromise, consensus, commitment, mutual social responsibility and good inter social as well as personal relationships as a panacea for promoting performance in organizations. This shows that this leadership style encompasses compromise and as such harnessed from all the other styles. It is also multi faced and multi layered leadership in terms of social, cultural, and historical context (Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges & de Luque, 2006). On the Kenyan context, leadership provisions are enshrined in chapter 6 of the constitution which out rightly establishes principles of governance and leadership in public institutions. The chapter outlines the basic minimum that a person who wishes to hold a public office must meet. At the same time, the principles which govern the administration of public affairs ought to be based on transparency, equality, fairness and tolerance. Leaders of public institutions have a threshold that they must meet in order to remain acceptable in the law.

Just like in other counties, Narok County has an established County Public Service Board. The board has several responsibilities according to article 235. These include: Establishing and abolishing offices in its public service; appointing persons to act in those offices and confirming appointments and exercising disciplinary control over and removing persons holding or acting in those offices. Primarily this is the organ at the county level that is in charge of Human Resources management. The board is usually charged with the mandate of change and continuity since after every five years, new office bearers take charge or in some cases, they remain but with a different

agenda. Being in charge of human resource, how they manage change is very critical. It is against this background that this study sought to determine the role of transactional leadership on organizational change in Narok County Service.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The Narok County Service Board was established under the County Government Act No.17 of 2012 as per the constitution of Kenya Article 235. The establishment of the County Public Service Board under section 7 of the County Government Act of 2012 did establish it as a body cooperate with perpetual succession and seal and capable of suing and being sued in its corporate name. Its mandate is to establish and maintain efficient professional and motivated public service that enhances efficient and effective service delivery (County Government of Narok, 2020). The board, therefore, has discretion on the type of leadership approach to adapt in ensuring that it steers the county in terms of having the right workforce, well managed and motivated employees who will enhance the delivery of the mandate that the administration seeks to attain.

Just like other counties, the Narok County Public Service Board usually experience organizational change after every election cycle. These changes are often necessitated by the need for the incoming administration to deliver on its mandate. In a bid to ensure that there is a well-managed transition, the Narok County Public Service Board has, on several occasions, employed the transactional leadership style that uses promotions, demotions, goal setting and restructuring as strategies towards attaining organizational change. However, not many studies exist to demonstrate the relationship between how transactional leadership influences organizational change. This, therefore, leaves a research gap, particularly in Narok County, which this study sought to fill by analyzing the influence that transactional leadership has on organizational change.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of the study was to find out the role of transactional leadership on organizational change management in the Narok County Service Board, Kenya.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Bass (2000), one of the most inevitable phenomena within an organization; be it small or big, is change. This is because of the relative nature of the circumstances which expose the organization to change which pressurize it to adjust. For example, in the late 90's when the era of Information Technology revolution had come, many organizations began adopting the use of

computers and technology devices in their operations. This posed a need for organizational change to realign to match the new developments. Consequently, many organizations, public and private alike, tried to adjust to these changes as it had become inevitable that the leadership was to implement a raft of measures in order to cope up with the Information Technology revolution that had taken place. Some of the changes which were witnessed, as Kim (2012) states included the restructuring of organizations to rid of duplication of roles as well as underutilized positions, retrenchment and redundancy. It is therefore apparent that organizational change is directly linked to the leadership because it takes the strategy and skill of the leader in order to steer the organization to adjust to the changing circumstances and context. Jung (2019) posits that leadership ensures that members within an organization have a particular direction that they are following; the leader becomes like a yardstick to steer the members towards the preferred direction. As such, the style of leadership becomes a very significant determinant of the organization.

However, if not well managed, it can result in complete disintegration of the organization and loose of focus which can result into negative repercussions. Therefore, at the management level, change ought to be treated with outmost care and thorough deliberations. Haphazard change is dangerous and it can reverse the gains made by the organization in a long time. Mwangi (2015) avers that change is inevitable in any organization and these needs to be appreciated by employees. It is up to the leaders to enlighten their employees of this inevitability of the change and how to adjust into the new mode of operation. Those organizations that are rigid to change often find it difficult to cope and survive for a long time in the ever changing workplace environment. At the same time, rigidity to change also creates in an organization a high employee turnover because of the need to explore other organizations that are accommodative to change and hence flexible. Therefore, there are plenty of reasons that explain how organizations benefit from change and how important they are able to adjust and translate the change for their better performance and attainment of the organizational objectives.

Promotions are incentives employed by the management to reward those employees who are committed and have exhibited exemplary performance by giving them upward mobility. Hartman (2020), states that this is a very significant strategy that can be used to enhance change in an organization. This because of the fact that employees are motivated and in the process, it gives them an opportunity to get increased compensation at the work place. Such increased

compensation enables the employees improve their lifestyle and also to quickly embrace change that is mooted in an organization. At the same time, employee promotions have a net effect on the development of a culture of merit based mobility. Once employees are able to see that it is possible to be promoted, it enables them to be propelled towards attaining organizational goals. According to Schroeder (2011), promotions should not be haphazard but rather should be entrenched in a policy which outlines the cadres and how one is able to move up the ladder in terms of promotions. This entails even having discussions with the employees so that they understand the policy in detail and as such, they work based on true knowledge of the intricacies of the promotion policy.

According to Alkahtani (2011), when it comes to transactional leadership, the system is based on rewards and punishments with a strong focus on results. The assumption taken by this style is that of low or no self-motivation among employees. This now permeates for a strict transaction based system with both incentives and punishments. Demotions are then used as a form of punishment in workers who fail to work towards the overall organizational objectives and goals. The transactional leadership style depends on the leader's ability to find appropriate rewards and punishments to influence employees to produce the desired results. Employees are given instructions by their leader and expects them to execute them; those who don't follow these instructions are punished in form of demotions. However, the transactional leader needs to be very sensitive to the reactions among the employees and be able to adjust accordingly so that rewards and demotions as punishments does satisfy all the involved parties.

The second step in creating goals entails creating a good statement; if the goal is not well defined, it could end up not being well articulated. Thereafter, one ought to define the action plan; this gives the goal statement the substance it needs. It helps the people involved to clarify the expectations. Lastly, the implementation is done. Take actions that will actualize the set goals. As this is done, the organization must ensure that the progress is monitored fully to ensure compliance. Where there are shortfalls, it ought to build up on them as it heads to full implementation.

Artus (2020) avers that organizations are dynamic systems and they cannot function in the same way all the time because they must quickly adjust to the new conditions that come day by day. As such, in order to smoothly and efficiently work, they need to evolve. This justifies the reason as to why organizations must undergo significant changes in their overall strategies, practices and operational tactics. Changes in the environment of the organizational forces the entities to react

and respond quickly to new changes as well as challenges that come along the way. Organizations ought to bear in mind that unless there are some modifications in the way of doing things, progress cannot take place. Global trends and internationalization bestows the call to organization the need to change in order to adapt to new changes. Therefore, restructuring involves major changes for the organization in its several departments and locations including procedures and processes. In theory, restructuring leads to a more efficient and modernized organizational entity. However, it may lead to as well to the deletion of jobs and the layoffs of personnel. The procedure of restructuring often revolves around focusing on problems related to debt and financing and as such, its major aim is usually to ensure that the operational costs are reduced.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized descriptive research plan. The study population comprised of Narok county employees from six departments under the County Public Service namely: Health, Devolution & Public Service Administration, Trade, Tourism and Investments, Finance & Economic Planning, Agriculture, Livestock & Cooperatives and Transport, infrastructure & Public works. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select the sample for this study. The sample size comprised of 155 respondents. This comprised 50% of the target population and ensured that all the strata within the study area were included in the study. Bartlett et al. (2001) suggest that researchers should use 50% as an estimate of population as this will result in the maximization of variance and produce the maximum sample size (Bartlett et al., 2001).

The primary instrument of collecting data was the questionnaire. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. In Quantitative analysis, data was analyzed by the use of SPSS software. Qualitative analysis on the other hand involved grouping the data collected in form of interviews and categorizing it into themes in accordance with research objectives and reported in narrative form along with quantitative presentation. It was used to reinforce the quantitative data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

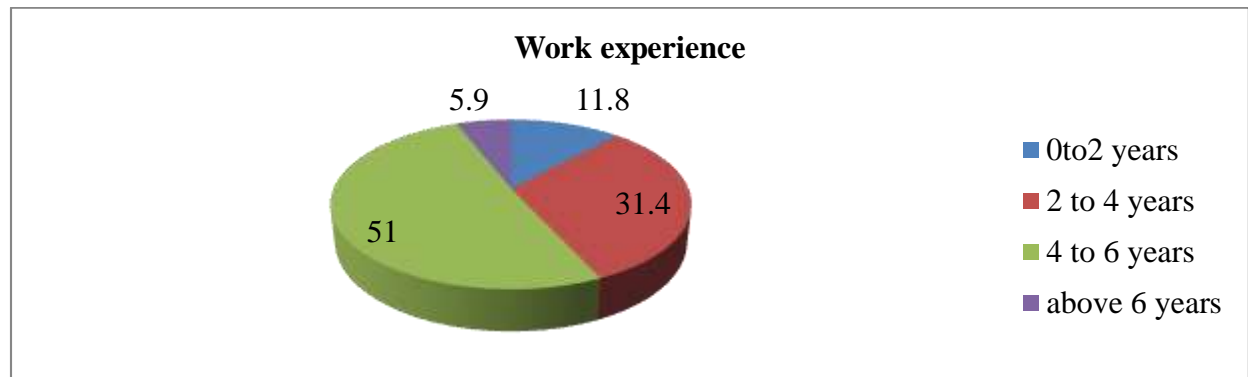
**Table 1: Gender of Respondents**

Gender	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	68.6	68.6	68.6
Female	31.4	31.4	100
Total	100	100	

The respondents' gender was important in understanding the distribution of gender in the County government of Narok. From the table above, it is apparent that a majority of the respondents were male (68.8%) were male while the remaining 31.4% were female. This reflection shows that the gender distribution is skewed towards the males.

### Work Experience

The second demographic detail was work experience. This also was considered as an important parameter in this research. This is because it was assumed that the longer a person's experience at the place of work, the more the person was considered knowledgeable about the issues in the place and as such will be in a better position to respond to the questions raised.



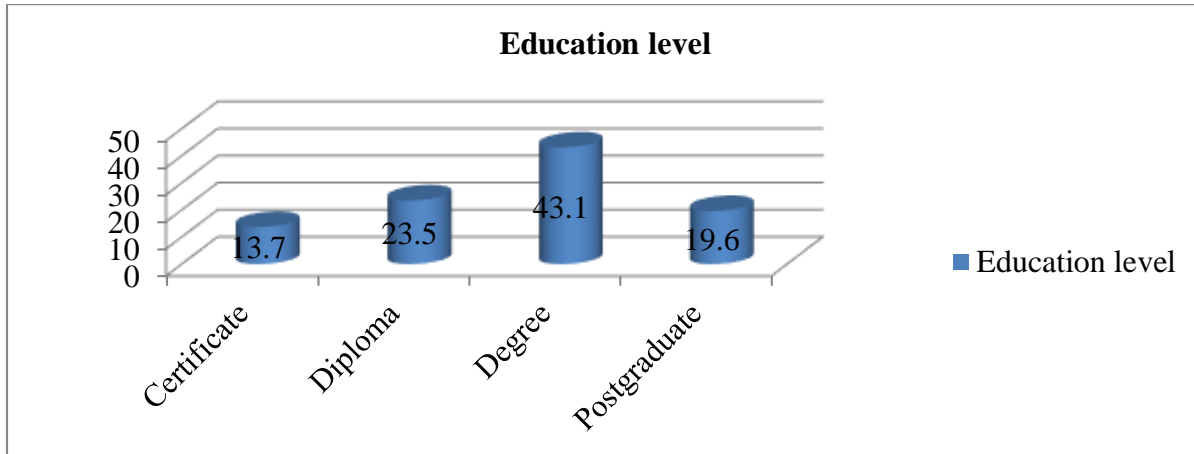
**Figure 1: Work Experience**

From figure 1 a majority of the respondents, 51% indicated having gained experience of between 4 to 6 years. At the same time, those who had gained experience of between 2 to 4 years were 31.4. Another 3% had experience of more than 6 years and a paltry 6% had experience below 2 years. This was an indication that the respondents had the requisite experience to respond to the questions.



### Educational Level of Respondents

The respondent's level of education was also considered as an important indicator towards the conception of the issue of transactional leadership. Possession of an educational qualification was therefore considered as an advantage in answering the questions that the study sought to answer.

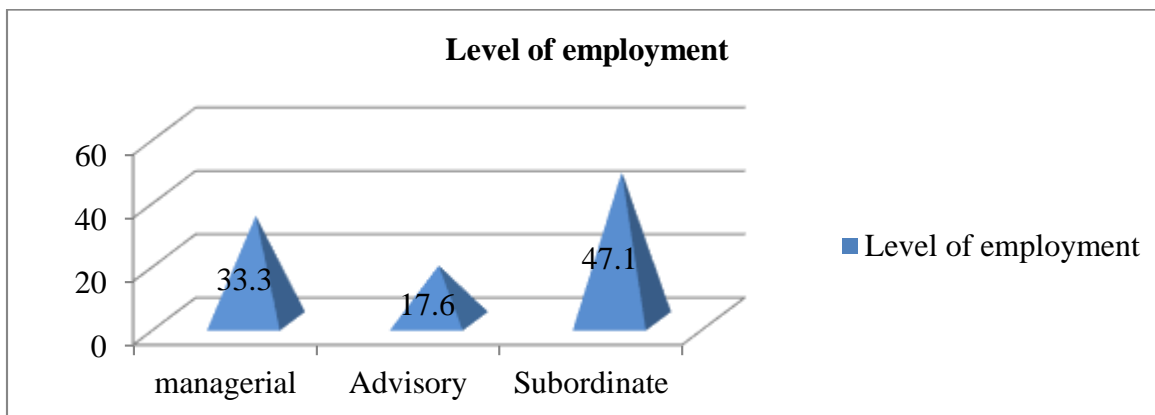


**Figure 2: Education level**

From the figure above, a majority of the respondents, (63%) indicated as having degree qualifications while another 23.5% had a diploma. Those with certificate and post-graduate qualifications were 13.7% and 19.6% respectively.

### Level of Employment

The study also sought to establish the level of employment of the respondents which was also considered as an important parameter in gauging the level of experience as well as the on job know how of the respondents at the Narok County Government.



**Figure 3: Level of Employment**

From the table above, it can be seen that a majority of them (47%) were at the subordinate level while another 33.3% were at managerial position. Those who were at the supervisory position were 17.6%. This shows that the distribution of the level of employment was varied given that the number of those who are subordinates are many and they become fewer as you move to the higher posts.

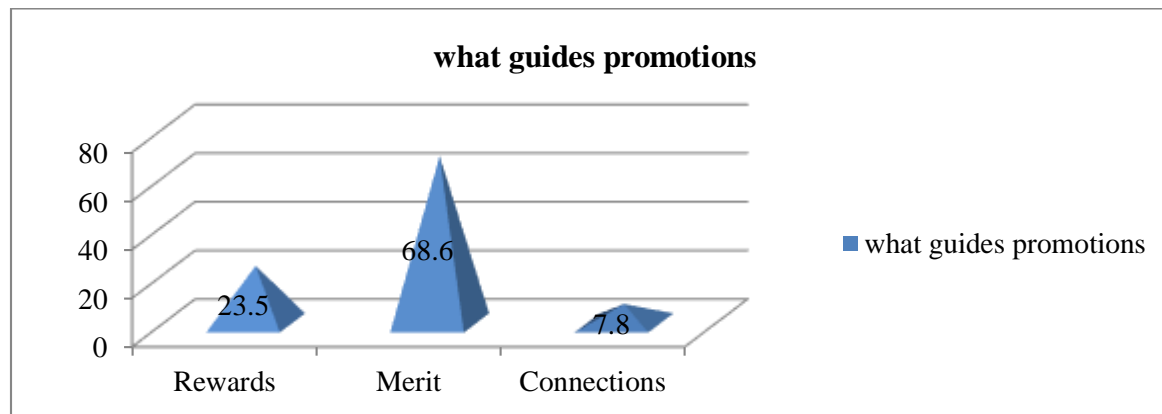
### The Role of Employee Promotions on Organizational Change

The study sought to establish how promotions as a transactional leadership strategy lead to organizational change. To this end, the respondents were asked several questions and their responses are as follows:

**Table 2: Frequency of Promotions**

Promotions occurrence	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
More often	19.6	19.6	19.6
Less often	70.6	70.6	90.2
uncertain	9.8	9.8	100
Total	100	100	

The second question in finding out the effects of promotions was for them to indicate what guides these promotions that occur in the organization. The responses are indicated below:



**Figure 4: Considerations for Promotions**

From the figure above, a majority of the respondents (68.6%) indicated that the promotions are guided by merit while 23.5% indicated that the promotions are guided by rewards. The remaining 7.8% averred that they are guided by connections. Therefore, this shows that as much as merit was a guiding factor, there were still other considerations such as rewards and connections which reflect transactional leadership style.

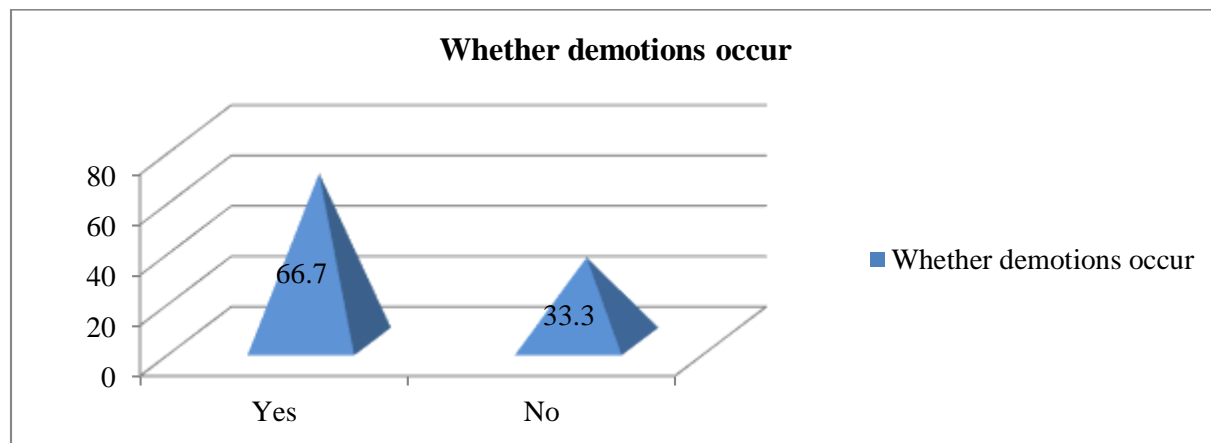
**Table 3: whether promotions enhance performance**

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	80.4	80.4	80.4
No	19.6	19.6	100
Total	100	100	

As to whether the promotions that are used at the workplace enhance the performance of the organization, a majority (80.4%) indicated in the affirmative while the remaining 19.6% in the negative as can be seen in the table below.

**The role of employee Demotions on Organizational Change**

The study sought to establish the role of employee demotions on organizational change. To this end, the respondents were asked to indicate whether demotions are normally used as a leadership strategy. The responses are presented in the figure below:



**Figure 5: Occurrences of Demotions**

From the figure above, it can be seen that 66.7% answered in the affirmative while the remaining 33.3 answered in the negative. This inference was that demotions do occur as part of organizational change in the organization.

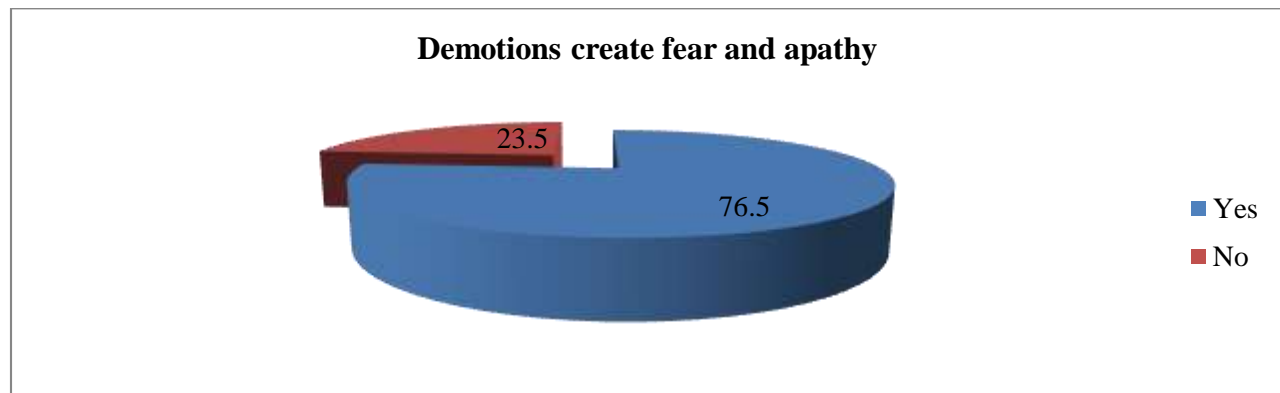
At the same time, the study also sought to investigate the role of demotions of employees as a strategy in transactional leadership on organizational change. The respondents were asked several questions as presented below:

**Table 4: Whether demotions enhance compliance**

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	66.7	66.7	66.7
No	33.3	33.3	100
Total	100	100	

This question aimed to ascertain whether demotions play a role in enhancing compliance to organizational goals and objectives. From the table above, a majority of the respondents (66.7%) indicated that demotions do enhance compliance because of the fear-factor that is created in employees. The remaining 33% answered in the negative. This shows that transactional leadership in Narok county government has by and large managed to push the employees into attaining their objectives.

It was also necessary to investigate further the impacts on the demotions towards the employees and as such, they were asked to indicate whether the demotions create fear in the employees. The respondents were therefore required to indicate whether they create fear and apathy. Their responses are indicated in the figure 4.7 below:



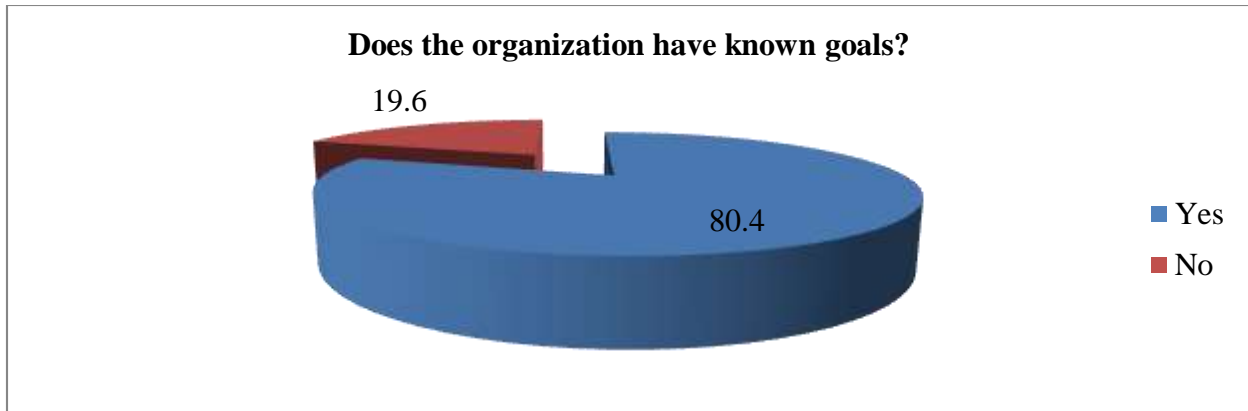
**Figure 6: Whether demotions create fear and apathy**

As to whether demotions create fear and apathy in employees, a majority of the respondents, 76.5% were of the opinion that indeed they do while the remaining 23.5% differed with the assertion. Those who answered in the affirmative went ahead to argue that when employees know that they can be demoted in case they do not deliver, this creates fear and the fear propels them to comply with what the organization has put in place. Therefore, it can also be deduced that as an instrument of transactional leadership, the employment of demotions was employed in creating fear and apathy among the employees of the Narok County government.

Demotion can be seen from the perspective of downward or delegation of a worker from his position to a position lower. From an organizational perspective, this is an administrative decision which strips off a person of the position that he or she has to a lower position which has less privileges. According to Merriam (2009), demotions are driven by incompetent employees or those who are having disciplinary cases and as such, one of the ways of sending an administrative message regarding their failure to accomplish organizational goals is through demotions. However, such a decision has far reaching consequences to the affected person; for example, it could likely lead to depression and feelings of despair as well as feeling demotivated. Sprague (1984) differs with this assertion by stating that demotions are important instruments of holding the organizational culture; it brings to the fore to employees that if one fails to meet the requirements of the organization, then the position he or she is holding is not a guarantee, it can be taken away. According to Alkahtani (2011), in transactional leadership; the system is based on rewards and punishments with a strong focus on results. The assumption taken by this style is that of low or no self-motivation among employees. This now permeates for a strict transaction based system with both incentives and punishments. Demotions are then used as a form of punishment in workers who fail to work towards the overall organizational objectives and goals. The transactional leadership style depends on the leader's ability to find appropriate rewards and punishments to influence employees to produce the desired results. Employees are given instructions by their leader and expect them to execute them; those who don't follow these instructions are punished in form of demotions. However, the transactional leader needs to be very sensitive to the reactions among the employees and be able to adjust accordingly so that rewards and demotions as punishments do satisfy all the involved parties.

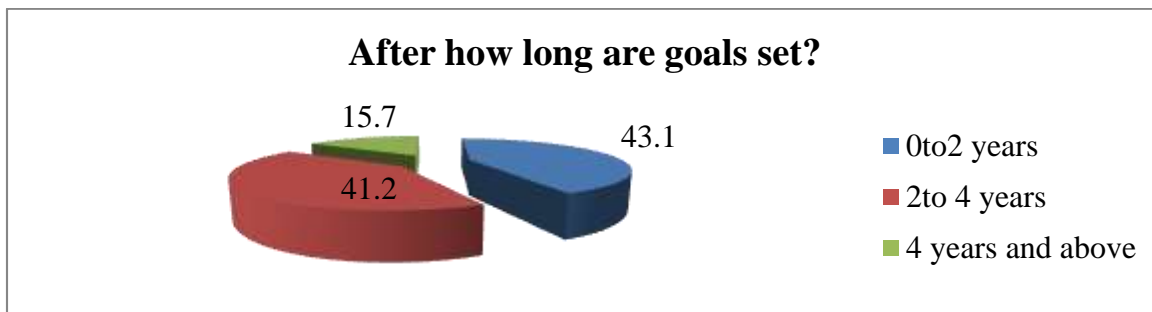
### **The extent to which Goal setting leads to Organizational change**

To be able to understand if the organization has goals in place that guide its operations, the respondents were asked several questions and their responses presented in the subsequent figures:



**Figure 7: Whether Organization Has Goals**

A majority of the respondents, 80.4% averred that indeed the organization has goals that all the employees are required to master and work towards attaining them. However, only 19.6% disagreed that the organization has goals.



**Figure 8: Time Goals set**

As to the period that the goals take to be set, 43.1% stated that it takes between 0 to 2 years while a similar percentage, 41.2% stated that it takes between 2 and 4 years. The remaining 15% indicated that the period for goals to be set normally takes 4 years and above. Therefore, as a transactional strategy, goal setting was employed in the Narok County government though at varying durations of time. Therefore, the organization treated goal setting as an important strategy in managing organizational change. At the same time, since each county government lasts for five years before being voted out or being re-elected, the period within which they take to review goals was within the realistically set time limits.

**Table 5: Actions taken after evaluation**

	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Layoffs	60.8	60.8	60.8
Disciplinary	35.3	35.3	96.1
Any other	3.9	3.9	100
Total	100	100	

Another significant component of organizational goals is that of evaluation. This process ensures that the goals are monitored and actions taken to ensure that they are attained to that end. A majority, 60.8% indicated that layoffs often follow for those people who fail to meet the targets of the organization while another 35.3% usually indicate that disciplinary action is usually meted out on those people who fail to meet targets. This normally takes the form of suspension and warning letters by the senior management team to those people. As a strategy to attain organizational change, target setting is a very important measure since it ensures that compliance is enforced and those who do not meet the stated objectives are usually held to account. This strategy therefore, from these findings was widely employed by the Narok County government from the high percentage of respondents who reported its use.

Goal setting therefore accrues positive results to the employees because it enables the bosses to assess and review their work based on the attainability of these goals or otherwise. At times, it also makes the bosses get frustrated because of the fact that if employees fail to attain goals because of an administrative lapse, the blame goes back to them. Gilda (1991) states that organizations with clear cut goals are able to achieve a lot in as far as their goals and aspirations are concerned because they hinge the goals on the performance. Every worker who joins the team is able to appreciate the direction that the organization takes because of the goals set.

**The extent to which Restructuring leads to Organizational Change**

The study also sought to establish the effects of restructuring on organizational change. This was done through asking the respondents several questions and the responses are presented in the tables that follow:

**Table 6: whether departments are re arranged to manage change**

	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Yes	58.8	58.8	58.8
No	41.2	41.2	100
Total	100	100	

At the same time, the respondents were asked to indicate if departments are usually rearranged to manage change after the period of target review. A majority, 58.8% indicated in the affirmative while another 41.2% indicated in the negative. When asked the length of time it takes to rearrange the organization, 52.9% indicated that it takes 1 year while the remaining 47.1% stated that it takes more than two years as indicated in the table below:

**Table 7: Length of time that restructuring takes place**

	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
1 year	52.9	52.9	52.9
More than 2 years	47.1	47.1	100
Total	100	100	

From the Table 6 above, it can be seen that restructuring is often done periodically; those who indicated that it is done after 1 year constituted 52% while the remaining 47% indicated that restructuring took place after two years. As a transactional strategy, it is important that in managing change, changes in roles of individuals and certain offices be modified, removed and reviewed in order to accomplish the changing objectives. Therefore, the strategy was part of the Narok County government's plans to manage change.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study concludes that as a transactional leadership strategy, the use of promotions is widespread in the county government but it ought to be well guided within a framework that is understood by all employees in order to enhance compliance and prevent the misuse of promotions as a tool to entice and punish employees. It was found out that demotions were common place, especially in those employees who failed to conform to organizational changes in the county government of Narok. The study concludes that demotions ought to be used as a measure of the last resort after employees have been trained and inducted on the new changes that are being fronted by the organization to enable them conceptualize them properly. Goal setting was also found to be existent in the county government's strategy. The study finds that the frequency of goal setting ranged from 1-4 years and concludes that since the county government has a term of five years,



the frequency of goal setting ought to be shorter to allow the administration to attain the objectives and set more within the time limit. At the same time, it ought to be enshrined in the strategic plan and monitored to ensure that the goals set are attained within the time that the government exists.

On restructuring, the Narok County government applies this transactional leadership strategy in managing change. Once the new government takes effect after elections, the administration often changes offices and merges others while abolishing those that are not in tandem with the objectives. This is usually as a result of the need to manage change which can steer the new administration to attain the objectives. The study thus concludes that as much as restructuring is an important strategy, it ought to be used after a thorough needs assessment as well as urgent necessity to avoid a situation where important portfolios can be diluted or ignored hence affecting the effectiveness of the organization in the process of attaining its objectives.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study findings, the following are the recommendations: First, more studies ought to be carried out in order to find out how public entities such as county governments can benefit from the private sector in terms of leadership approaches and how change is managed in the private entities. At the same time, a study on the challenges that county governments face in an attempt to enforce organizational change is necessary in order to detail what prevents the attainment of organizational change in these organizations.

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