

FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE IN THE COUNTY GOVERNMENTS: A CASE OF MANDERA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem: Performance of employees is an important factor for all organizations worldwide. It describes the timely, effective, and efficient fulfilment of tasks by specific individuals in order to meet organizational goals. However, performance of employees has been low with many unable to meet set deadlines characterized with productivity.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study was to examine factors influencing employees' performance in County Governments with a particular emphasis on Mandera County.

Methodology: Target population was 1030 medical staff consisting of Doctors, Nurses, pharm technologists, lab technicians, Clinical officers, Community Health Workers and Nutritionists from which a sample of 205 respondents was drawn. Quantitative data was analyzed using Structural Equation Model. Stratified random sampling technique was employed a descriptive summary design was used to select 94 health facilities that yielded interviews with 205 health care workers, grouped into different types of cadres.

Findings: The study found that 33.0% of the respondents agreed that they are likely to leave their current work station, and 35 percent of the respondents were neutral. This is attributed to cases of insecurity, remuneration problems, lack of progression policies, feedback and unattractive salaries.

Recommendations: The County Governments should increase workplace flexibility, strengthen supervisors' interpersonal relationships with subordinates, provide job aid, provide performance feedback, and improve work incentives. County Governments may boost their employee performance by providing their workers with better compensation, job security, and recognition programs as well as boost work-place security.

Keywords: *Factors, security, retention policies, employees' performance.*

INTRODUCTION

Performance of employees in any organization is key to the success of such organizations and is the employee output determined through productivity, efficiency and ability to meet deadlines. According to Mawoli and Babandako (2011), employee performance is the act of accomplishing set targets within a given period. It involves the delivery of desired output in terms of goods and services to satisfy customer expectations or needs. Performance relates to employees' observable behaviours and actions to satisfy the job's requirements. Armstrong (2019) posits that employee performance is characterized by the quality of goods and services produced and the achievement of set objectives within a given period. Afshar and Doosti (2016) argue that employee performance is the degree to which employees accurately perform their duties, the timeliness of their service delivery and the attainment of relevant results when undertaking given tasks. However, in many employees' performance has been low with many employees unable to meet set deadlines, inefficient thus registering low productivity.

In the context of devolved units, the scenario is the same with employees' performance being always at lower levels. For example, a report by Davic, Mohr, Gavy, Young, James and Burges (2020) shows that, in Sri Lanka, only 34.9% of staff do meet their set deadlines and performance targets, 56.9% are not efficient whereas a paltry 12.4% register improved productivity. This has been attributed to the inability of the county governments to retain qualified employees. To mitigate these challenges, many devolved units across the world have formulated policy frameworks on how to retain workers. Staff retention policies include strategies for convincing employees to stay with a company in the long run.

According to Mita, Aarti and Ravneeta (2019), staff retention is a business strategy for maintaining a creative workforce while meeting the organization's required operating costs. Domfeh (2018) asserts that staff retention is an act of encouraging employees to remain with the organization for an extended period of time or until a project is completed. These practices include recruitment, compensation, selection, training and development, and employee engagement. A study conducted by Noor (2019) on the relationship between work-life balance and intention to leave among academics in Malaysian public higher education institutions, revealed that there is a significant and positive relationship between work-life balance and the intention to leave the University among academics. This finding agrees with the study findings of Kwame, Boahen and Denu (2018), which shows that a good balance

between the work and non-work domains is necessary for better employee performance. As revealed by Kurdia, Alshuridehb and Alafaishat (2020), in their study on the effect of career development policies on employee turnover in public sector organisations, career development plays a significant role in attracting and motivating employees. The study concluded that implementing career development policies helps attract and retain quality staff due to the added skills and knowledge. The study recommended that career progression opportunities be provided through training and development of employee performance standards to be raised to the public's expectation.

In Kenya, the situation is not quite different with many counties instituting policies and strategies on how retain employees. For example, a study carried out in Migori County by Ongoro and Oloko (2019), on the effect of stress on job performance among police officers, found that most (79%) of police officers were stressed due to long working hours, poor working and living conditions, intimidation and threats from senior officers and frequent transfers without notice. The study recommended that the National Police Service hire more police officers to reduce the workload and long working hours, counsel the police officers regularly and train them on emotional intelligence. The study also recommended that police officers be involved and consulted in decisions related to transfers and promotions. This study agrees with the findings of Kakui and Gachunga (2019), who contend that training and development contribute to career development, enhancing employee loyalty and staff retention.

Another study was conducted by Ooko, Manyasi and Ondiek (2018) on the effect of talent retention strategy on employee productivity in private sugar companies in Kakamega County, which revealed that talent retention strategies had a positive and significant relationship with employees' productivity. It was recommended that organisations put in place and implement inclusive compensation and reward policies to retain their productive employees. However, Mandera County is no exception with performance of employees being low despite the enactment of staff retention policies. Thus, this study sought to examine the influence of staff retention policies on employees' performance in Mandera County.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem addressed in this research is employee performance in Mandera County, located in the North Eastern part of Kenya, which is occasioned by high staff turnover rate in the health sector in and its impact on health service delivery.

The root cause of the issue is insecurity associated with the porous border that the County shares with Somalia, which has resulted in the abduction or killing of health workers and other government workers. The resultant effect of this challenge is health workers leaving the service for fear of their security, leading to a weakened workforce, brain drain, low morale, increased workload, and high demand for service, all of which contribute to poor quality of services and productivity. Although many factors affect employee performance, this study focused on how insecurity causes staff turnover, leading to performance gaps, and the adoption of retention policies that can be used to address this issue. The study used the Expectancy Theory of Motivation to investigate the factors driving staff performance, with a particular focus on the effects of insecurity on health workers' intention to turnover and their performance. The research aimed to identify retention policies that can be adopted to mitigate high staff turnover and improve health service delivery in the County.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study sought to examine the influence of retention policies on employees' performance in Mandera County, Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the theory of work adjustment which was postulated by Dawis and Lofquist in 1984. This theory was premised on the fact that work is conceptualized and perceived as an interaction between individual employees and the work environment, according to this theory. Individuals bring their skills and knowledge to the workplace to complete the tasks. The individual in this exchange relationship requires specific rewards/compensation to perform work. For the employee to perform work, certain preferred conditions, such as a comfortable and safe workplace, must exist. Dawis and Lofquist (1984) argue that even good correspondence changes over time, especially when skills develop so much that they outgrow the roles performed by the employee. This theory was suitable in this study in that helped understand how the employee working environment contributes to staff turnover and affect performance.

The study was also based on rational choice theory which was proposed by Downs (1957). It was premised on the belief that individuals use self-interest to make decisions that benefit them the most. The Rational Choice Theory is a theory that holds that man is a reasoning being who weighs the costs and benefits of options and thus makes rational decisions. In other words, all actions are rational and are made after weighing the costs and benefits. According to the rational choice theory, people use their self-interest to make decisions that would benefit them the most. People weigh their options and choose what they believe will best serve them. This theory is important because it explains how people make decisions. According to this theory, every decision is completed by taking into account the costs, risks, and benefits of that decision. Choices that appear irrational to one person may make perfect sense to another based on their desires. People consider their options and choose the one they believe will best serve them. This theory was suitable in this study in that it explains the behaviour or response of workers to different challenges such as insecurity. How individuals decide what would serve them best is dependent on personal preferences. For instance, with better remuneration and higher packages, health workers may decide to continue working in harsh environments and develop coping mechanisms. Therefore, it would allow this study to assess or simulate strategies that can be used to retain workers even in the case of insecurity, such as offering or increasing hardship allowances.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE) to investigate how retention policies influence employee performance in Mandera County. The DCE involved presenting hypothetical scenarios to a sample of employees in the county and asking them to choose between different options. The scenarios were constructed using a fractional factorial design, which varied the attributes of the job that affect staff turnover and employee performance. The attributes included hardship allowance, type of contract, career path, job location, and security and safety. The levels of each attribute were varied to capture the range of values that exist in the county some attributes such as hardship allowance are expressed in relative terms to salary to allow for use of one data collection instrument.

The target population of the study was 1030 health personnel consisting of Nurses, pharm technologists, Laboratory technicians, Doctors, Clinical officers, Nutritionists and Community Health Workers working in 94 public health facilities in the County Health Department in Mandera County Government. To ensure that the sample size is manageable, a

sample size of 20% (205) respondents was used. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23) and presented using tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the objective. It also outlines the methods of presentation of the study findings and discussions.

RESPONSE RATES

In this study, data were collected from 187 respondents, which represented a response rate of 91.2%. This yielded an average response rate of 90.9%, which is consistent with the assertions of Creswell (2014) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate. This information was important since it allowed the researcher to generalize the study outcomes to the target population.

Influence of Retention Policies on Employees' Performance

The study sought to examine how retention policies influence employees' performance in Mandera County. This focused on factors which cause employee turnover and pre-requisite policy interventions. In other words, understanding the length of service distribution can help organizations develop appropriate retention strategies and employee engagement initiatives tailored to the needs of different employee groups. Results are shown in Table 4;

Table 4: Reasons for Leaving Mandera County

Reason for Leaving Mandera County	Freq	Percent	Cum.
Attractive benefits elsewhere	24	12.83	12.83
Better salary elsewhere	40	21.39	34.22
Difficulty in having a work-life balance	11	5.88	40.11
Lack of feedback and recognition	14	7.49	47.59
Lack of growth & progression	93	49.73	97.33
Little opportunity for decision making	5	2.67	100
Total	187	100	

From Table 4, it is evident that many dynamics come into play to occasion transfer of workers from Mandera County. These include lack of attractive benefits, better salaries, difficulty in having work-life balance, feedback, recognition, progression as well as little or no opportunity for decision-making. These factors play a crucial role in shaping employee performance and job satisfaction within the organization. In other words, the variables "hardship allowance," "

contract type," " limited career opportunities," and " job location in the home town " are significant factors affecting staff choices in the analysis. Based on the coefficients of the variables, it seems that offering more secure contract types and providing better career opportunities could potentially reduce the staff turnover rate in Mandera County more cost-effectively than increasing hardship allowance. Additionally, efforts to post workers in their hometown may also contribute to staff retention. The study also found insecurity as a key contributor to low performance among employees as shown in Table 5;

Table 5: Status of Security at Employees' Residence

Security level at residence	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
High	27	14.44	14.44
Low	63	33.69	48.13
Medium	97	51.87	100
Total	187	100	

Table 5 shows that, while a substantial percentage of respondents (51.87%) consider their homes to have a medium level of security and safety, a significant number (33.69%) still feel that their residences have a low level of security and safety. Addressing the concerns of those who perceive a low security level can be crucial for improving the overall sense of safety in residential areas. Policymakers and residents should work together to implement measures that enhance the security and safety of neighborhoods and homes. These findings point to the fact that insecurity has a significant impact on the performance of employees in Mandera County.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the study findings, it is evident that, low hardship allowance, contract type, limited career opportunities, location in the home town and insecurity lead to employee turnover. Hence poor performance. The review of literature undertaken in this study, the findings of some other research studies carried out by other scholars that were reviewed in this study and the findings of this study itself have established that it is a common phenomenon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, to improve staff retention and performance, Mandera County should consider implementing policies that enhance security, create more career growth opportunities, and optimize job locations-employee desired-location alignment. Offering attractive financial incentives like higher hardship allowances could also be explored. However, the analysis

suggests that addressing insecurity alone may not be a significant factor in improving health worker performance and retention in the region. Finally, the management should include the employees in some of the decisions that will affect the workers and their working conditions. This will create sense of belonging and ownership on the part of the employee.

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