

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE
PERFORMANCE IN FOOD PROCESSING COMPANIES IN NAIROBI
COUNTY, KENYA**

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Abstract

The food processing industry plays a crucial role within the agricultural sector by acting as a link between primary production and ultimate consumption. The industry enhances the value of agricultural commodities and provides employment possibilities for individuals in Kenya. The industry has faced several challenges in management of their employees due to issues related to career progression within the companies specifically the opportunities for growth and development. The primary aim of this research was to evaluate the effect of career development practices on employees' performance in these firms. The study focused on how three-career development practices employee maintenance, continuous learning and promotions can contribute to influence employees' performance within the firms. The research anchored on two theories; the Needs-Based Theory and the Goal-Setting Theory. The research design used in this study was descriptive. The sample consisted of 55 food-processing enterprises located in Nairobi County. Two managers were selected from each the target firms, with a sample size of 110 respondents. Questionnaires were the tools used to collect data and analysis of the data used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study used a regression model to determine the influence of career development practices on employee performance. The results of the study revealed that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between career development practices and employee performance in the firms. The study recommends that more emphasize should be towards diversifying approaches used to attract and retain employees. Secondly, growing a culture of continuous learning by providing opportunities to the employees needs requires more focus. Thirdly, promotion on merit should be encouraged to improve transparency and accountability among employees that would improve overall performance of the employee in the firms.

Key words: *Career, Development, Practices, Retention, Performance*

1. INTRODUCTION

Career development is a multifaceted process that encompasses the pursuit of professional growth, skill enhancement, and the achievement of career goals (Wang & Huang, 2022). It involves the continuous evolution of an individual's knowledge, abilities, and experiences within a chosen field. Through deliberate planning, strategic decision-making, and proactive engagement, individuals can navigate their career paths effectively and achieve long-term success (Theeboom, 2019). Career development in training and development is crucial for both individuals and organizations. It involves the ongoing process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and competencies to enhance performance in designing, delivering, and evaluating training programs. As workplace learning becomes increasingly important in today's competitive landscape, training and development professionals play a vital role in driving organizational success and ensuring the growth and development of employees (Bono, 2017). This study focused on maintenance, continuous learning and promotion methods that could be considered by the food processing firms to improve employee performance.

Employee performance refers to the ability and effectiveness with which an individual carries out their job responsibilities within an organization (Smith, Tillema & Wright, 2019). It encompasses various aspects, such as productivity, efficiency, quality of work, meeting targets, and contributing to the overall success of the company (Nechifor, 2021). The evaluation of employee performance plays a vital role in managing and improving organizational performance. One key factor influencing employee performance is the level of employee engagement (Osato, 2020). Engaged employees are enthusiastic about their work, committed to the organization's goals, and motivated to give their best effort. High levels of employee engagement positively correlate with increased productivity, job satisfaction, and overall performance (Kahn, 2017).

Moreover, the organizational culture and work environment influence employee performance. A positive and supportive culture that values employee well-being, recognizes achievements, and promotes teamwork and collaboration can enhance individual and collective performance (O'Reilly et al., 2014). Employee performance is a multifaceted concept influenced by various factors such as employee engagement, communication, feedback, training, and organizational culture. The study indicators for employee performance were target achievements, compliance with procedures and employee engagement.

Food processing companies play a crucial role in Nairobi County's economy and food supply chain (Kimaru, Ngugi & Mugambi, 2022). Nairobi County, being the capital and largest city of Kenya, has a significant 55 of these companies due to its central location and access to transportation networks. These companies are involved in various sectors of the food processing industry, including manufacturing, packaging, and distribution (Wamalwa, Upadhyaya, Kamau, & McCormick, 2019). The food processing companies in Nairobi County contribute significantly to the local economy, employment, food security, and the development of the agricultural sector (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The food processing companies operating in various categories that include Dairy processing companies, grain milling companies, fruit and vegetable processing, meat processing companies, snack food companies, beverage companies, bakery and confectionery companies. They play a crucial role in transforming raw agricultural produce into safe, convenient, and value-added food products for consumers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gupta and Sharma (2018) conducted a study to explore the effect of career development programs on employee performance in the manufacturing industry. The study highlighted the importance of providing employees with continuous opportunities for career development to enhance their performance and productivity. Ali et al. (2019) study concluded that career development initiatives positively influence employee performance and contribute to organizational success in the Information Technology industry.

Hsu and Huang (2021) findings revealed that employees who actively engaged in career development programs exhibited higher levels of job performance, customer satisfaction, and innovation. The study emphasized the importance of aligning career development initiatives with the specific needs of employees in the service industry to maximize performance outcomes.

Wang and Huang (2022) investigated the effect of career development on employee performance in the healthcare sector. The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between career development and employee performance. The study recommended that healthcare organizations invest in career development programs to enhance employee performance and improve patient care quality.

Ng'ethe et al. (2012) findings indicated a significant positive relationship between staff retention strategies and employee performance in public universities in Kenya. Chepkilot and Rugar (2018) examined the relationship between career development and employee performance in the hospitality industry in Kenya. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between career development and employee performance. The study recommended the implementation of customized training programs to address specific skill gaps in the hospitality sector.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research style in order to provide an accurate depiction of various conditions (Saunders et al., 2009). The present study adopted this design to delineate the specific attributes and further information pertaining to study variables. The population consisted of the 55 food processing firms in Nairobi County. 2 supervisors were purposively selected from each of the 55 food processing firms making a total of 110 respondents was used in the study as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Target Population

Category	No.	Number of food processing firms	Total
Supervisors	2	55	110
Total			110

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), census is a study where all members, objects or things in the population take part in the research. This study used census technique where the entire population of 110 respondents were selected being a suitable when the levels of accuracy and reliability required in the study are very high and members of the population are few, (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

Primary data was collected using questionnaires to enable standardized data collection, ensuring consistency and comparability across respondents. The analysis of quantitative data obtained by a questionnaire included the use of descriptive statistics, specifically using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings were presented in the form of percentages, means, standard deviations, and frequencies. The study used a regression model to examine the impact of training and development on employee performance. This analysis facilitated the assessment of the associations between the dependent and independent variables in the research. The regression model was as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where;

Y = Employee Performance

X₁ = Career Development Practices

β₀ = Constant Term;

β₁ = Beta coefficients;

ε = Error Term.

4. FINDINGS

All questionnaires were distributed for the purpose of this research, with 103 questionnaires successfully completed and returned. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) and Kothari (2004) indicate that a response rate of 50% is deemed satisfactory for a descriptive research.

The study examined the relationship between career development practices and on employee performance within food processing industries located in Nairobi County, Kenya. The research assessed the participants' degree of concurrence with the several assertions pertaining to professional advancement. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Outputs on career development practices

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	S.D
My organization provides mentoring programs to support my career development.	12.6%	11.7%	12.6%	34.0%	29.1%	3.55	1.356
My organization provides regular guidance and feedback from my mentors to improve my performance.	8.7%	8.7%	10.7%	35.0%	36.9%	3.83	1.264
My organization provides have coaching sessions or programs that enhance my professional growth	10.7%	18.4%	6.8%	38.8%	25.2%	3.5	1.335
The coaching sessions in my organization focus on specific areas for improvement and skill enhancement.	11.7%	11.7%	10.7%	40.8%	25.2%	3.56	1.304
My organization provides opportunities for me to discuss and plan my long-term career goals.	8.7%	10.7%	9.7%	41.7%	29.1%	3.72	1.24
My organization provides support in creating a career development plan tailored to my aspirations.	7.8%	16.5%	8.7%	30.1%	36.9%	3.72	1.324
Average						3.65	1.30

The first statement examined the availability of mentoring programs for supporting career development. Approximately 61.1% of respondents (combined Agree and Strongly Agree percentages) indicated that their organizations provide mentoring programs, showing a positive trend in supporting employees' career growth through mentorship. On the provision of regular guidance and feedback from mentors to enhance performance, 71.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the availability of guidance and feedback, highlighting the significance of mentorship in driving performance improvements among employees

Furthermore, the study investigated the presence of coaching sessions or programs that contribute to professional growth. The results show that 63.9% of respondents indicated that their organizations offer such coaching sessions, emphasizing the role of coaching in enhancing employees' skills and expertise. The focus on specific areas for improvement and skill enhancement during coaching sessions was also explored. About 66% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that coaching sessions in their organizations concentrate on targeted skill development, demonstrating a commitment to refining employees' competencies.

In terms of career planning, the study assessed the opportunities for discussing and planning long-term career goals. A substantial 70.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations provide such opportunities, indicating that employees are supported in charting their career trajectories. The creation of tailored career development plans aligned with employees' aspirations was also investigated. 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations offer support in crafting personalized career development plans, highlighting a proactive approach to aligning employee goals with organizational objectives.

The mean score for all the assertions was found to be 3.65, accompanied by a standard deviation of 1.30. The findings indicate that the supervisors within the examined organization had a generally favorable view of career development strategies. The results emphasize the significance of mentorship, coaching, and career planning in augmenting employee performance within food processing enterprises located in Nairobi County, Kenya. The favorable reactions expressed by the participants suggest that these facets of professional advancement are widely seen as having a good impact on the overall development and effectiveness of those employed in the food processing sector. The results align with the research conducted by Gupta and Sharma (2018), which demonstrated a notable and favorable correlation between career development and employee performance.

The study conducted by Jiang et al. (2020) revealed a robust and favorable correlation between career growth and employee performance. The study conducted by Ali et al. (2019) shown a significant improvement in employee performance subsequent to their involvement in career development initiatives. The study conducted by Hsu and Hung (2021) shown that individuals who actively participated in career development programs had elevated levels of job performance, customer satisfaction, and creativity. The study conducted by Nasution *et al.* (2015) revealed a noteworthy correlation between training and development initiatives and the performance of employees. The research conducted by Ombui & Muathe (2019) shown a considerable improvement in employee performance because of training and development initiatives. The findings of Chepkilot and Rugar's (2018) study demonstrated a statistically significant and favorable association between career development and employee performance.

Employee Performance

The research assessed the degree of agreement among the participants over the over the influence of Career Development Practices on employee performance. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics Outputs on Employee performance

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	S.D
Employees are able to meet the performance targets set by your supervisor/manager	11.7%	11.7%	12.6%	35.9%	28.2%	3.57	1.33
Employees adhere to the established procedures and guidelines while performing your job duties	7.8%	16.5%	8.7%	32.0%	35.0%	3.70	1.31
Employees are motivated and engaged in work	8.7%	13.6%	9.7%	34.0%	34.0%	3.71	1.30
Employees are aware of and understand the procedures and guidelines relevant to my role.	7.8%	13.6%	12.6%	34.0%	32.0%	3.69	1.27
Employees are satisfied with their job and find it fulfilling.	6.8%	11.7%	12.6%	41.7%	27.2%	3.71	1.19
Employee work processes and outputs meet the quality standards set by the company	9.7%	11.7%	7.8%	35.0%	35.9%	3.76	1.32
Average						3.69	1.29

The first statement assessed whether employees were able to meet the performance targets set by their supervisors or managers. The responses indicated that 11.7% of respondents strongly disagreed, 11.7% disagreed, 12.6% were neutral, 35.9% agreed, and 28.2% strongly agreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.57, with a standard deviation of 1.33.

The second statement focused on whether employees adhere to established procedures and guidelines while performing their job duties. The responses showed that 7.8% of respondents strongly disagreed, 16.5% disagreed, 8.7% were neutral, 32.0% agreed, and 35.0% strongly agreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.70, with a standard deviation of 1.31.

These findings suggest that a considerable number of respondents agreed that employees were following procedures and guidelines, indicating a relatively positive view of adherence.

The third statement evaluated whether employees were motivated and engaged in their work. The responses revealed that 8.7% of respondents strongly disagreed, 13.6% disagreed, 9.7% were neutral, 34.0% agreed, and 34.0% strongly agreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.71, with a standard deviation of 1.30. These results indicate that a notable portion of respondents agreed that employees exhibited motivation and engagement, reflecting a positive perception of employees' attitudes toward their work.

The fourth statement aimed to determine whether employees were aware of and understood the procedures and guidelines relevant to their roles. The responses showed that 7.8% of respondents strongly disagreed, 13.6% disagreed, 12.6% were neutral, 34.0% agreed, and 32.0% strongly agreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.69, with a standard deviation of 1.27. These findings suggest that a significant number of respondents believed employees had a good understanding of the relevant procedures and guidelines.

The fifth statement assessed whether employees were satisfied with their jobs and found them fulfilling. The responses indicated that 6.8% of respondents strongly disagreed, 11.7% disagreed, 12.6% were neutral, 41.7% agreed, and 27.2% strongly agreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.71, with a standard deviation of 1.19. These results suggest that a substantial proportion of respondents perceived employees as being satisfied with their jobs and finding them fulfilling.

The sixth statement examined whether employee work processes and outputs met the quality standards set by the company. The responses showed that 9.7% of respondents strongly disagreed, 11.7% disagreed, 7.8% were neutral, 35.0% agreed, and 35.9% strongly agreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.76, with a standard deviation of 1.32. These findings indicate that a considerable number of respondents believed that employees were meeting quality standards in their work processes and outputs.

In summary, the responses indicate that employees were generally seen as meeting performance targets, adhering to procedures, being motivated and engaged, understanding their roles, finding satisfaction in their jobs, and meeting quality standards. The mean scores and standard deviations suggest varying levels of agreement among respondents across these different aspects of employee performance. This is in line with Osato (2020) who indicated that a key factor influencing employee performance is the level of employee engagement. Engaged employees are enthusiastic about their work, committed to the organization's goals, and motivated to give their best effort. High levels of employee engagement positively correlate with increased productivity, job satisfaction, and overall performance (Kahn, 2017; Harter et al., 2012).

Regression Model

The results provide further evidence supporting the significance of the regression model, as shown by the F-statistic of 67.994 ($p < 0.000$). This supports the fact that the p-value was 0.000, which is below the conventional significance level of 0.05. The research used a regression coefficient analysis to determine the statistical significance of the connection between the independent factor and the dependent variable. The results of the regression coefficients are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Regression of Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	.546	.272		2.005	.048
Career development	.595	.071	.549	8.352	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

The fitted model;

$$Y = 0.546 + \beta X_1 0.595$$

Where;

Y = Employee Performance

X₁ = Career Development Practices

The constant term (intercept) is 0.546, and it is statistically significant ($t = 2.005$, $p = .048$). This suggests that even when career development is at zero, there is still a positive baseline effect on employee performance. Career development is associated with the coefficient of $\beta = 0.595$, $p = .001$ and is highly significant, indicating a strong positive relationship between career development opportunities and employee performance. The results align with the research conducted by Gupta and Sharma (2018), which demonstrated a notable and favorable correlation between career development and employee performance. The study conducted by Jiang et al. (2020) revealed a significant and favorable correlation between career growth and employee performance. The study conducted by Ali et al. (2019) shown a significant improvement in employee performance subsequent to their engagement in career development initiatives. The study conducted by Hsu and Hung (2021) shown that workers who actively participated in career development programs demonstrated enhanced job performance, customer satisfaction, and creativity. The study conducted by Nasution *et al.*, (2018) revealed a noteworthy correlation between training and development initiatives and the performance of employees. The research conducted by Ombui and Muathe (2019) shown a considerable improvement in employee performance because of training and development initiatives. The study conducted by Chepkilot and Rugar (2018) yielded findings that demonstrated a statistically significant and favorable relationship between career development and employee performance.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of the study focused on understanding the effect of career development practices on employee performance within food processing companies. The analysis indicated a strong positive correlation between career development opportunities and employee performance. This underscores the significance of providing employees with avenues for growth and advancement, which in turn leads to higher levels of performance. The statistical significance of this correlation reinforces the notion that investing in employees' career development can have a positive influence on their performance.

The study recommends that organizations prioritize career development opportunities for their employees. Providing clear pathways for advancement, skill enhancement, and personal growth can motivate employees to perform at their best. Companies should establish mentorship programs, workshops, and development plans that cater to individual employee aspirations. Regular discussions about career goals and progress should be encouraged between employees and their supervisors. By fostering an environment that values career development, organizations can enhance employee engagement and contribute to overall performance improvement.

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