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Joyce Mulu

Machakos University, Kenya

Anne Kalei

Machakos University, Kenya

John Achuora

Machakos University, Kenya

Influence of autonomy on performance of employees in Machakos county government, Kenya

Joyce Mulu, Anne Kalei and John Achuora

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the influence of autonomy on performance of employees in Machakos County Government. This study was guided by Equity theory developed by John Stacey Adams and states that employees weigh their input into a job against the output. A descriptive research design was used because it allowed a systematic and well-ordered description which was reliable, accurate as well as valid. The target population of 520 was constituting of top level, middle level and lower level employees of Machakos County government. To achieve the objective a sample of 156 respondents was drawn from the population. Questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection. The data was analyzed using the STATA version 17, by use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. Regression model was used to estimate coefficient of the variable in the objective. The study concluded that there was a strong relationship between employee autonomy and performance. This implies that a higher percentage of employees require independence to perform better in line with organizational expectations. The results showed that autonomy as a non-monetary incentive influences employee performance. Based on the findings, the study recommends that employers to capitalize on non-monetary benefits by giving their employees room for autonomy and also Kenya's government to institute labor rules prioritizing on workers' autonomy inside their firms over monetary compensation.

Keywords: Autonomy, performance, incentives

1. Introduction

Employee autonomy is the process of developing an individual's confidence, capability and sense of control over their job results (Sousa, Coelho & Guillamon, 2012) ^[14]. Employers should empower workers by communicating the organization's mission and vision, communicating specific and quantifiable individual objectives and expectations, delegating and providing timely feedback. Thus, empowering workers fosters a healthy work environment and empowers them to utilize their skills and abilities to contribute to their plan, thus enhancing productivity (Dobre, 2013) ^[5].

Background

According to Danish and Usman (2010) ^[4], autonomy perception at work is a significant value in numerous diverse cultures. Autonomy perception increases satisfaction of the employee even in the greatest repetitive work, hence leading to improved production in difficult work (Danish & Usman, 2010) ^[4]. Employees given more freedom usually demonstrate good outcomes in relation to performance and satisfaction of the job, even if independence has been differently defined in ways comprising the aptitude to work from home and flexible hours across a diverse array of cultures. Profound impact on an employee performance and productivity have an implication on extent of freedom offered to an employee. Since employee independence have both gains and shortcomings, finding the correct equilibrium between authoritarian control and complete independence is the hard part of the equation. Saragih (2015) ^[13] expresses how an individual is affected by independence, and also proclaims that even though independence is positively associated with satisfaction and greater performance and so as to produce maximum results the employee's independence must have boundaries.

Employees do not usually require a person to watch over them constantly, they prefer an independent way of working. Unlike when they are always followed in whatever they do,

Corresponding Author:**Joyce Mulu**

Machakos University, Kenya

employees mostly like getting responsibilities which are time-framed and they are then given independence to work on them. In a study by Ncube (2012) ^[11], established an optimistic affiliation existence between the performance of particular organization as well as the employee’s independence. The author asserted that letting employees to have freedom in their everyday work significantly contributes to satisfaction of the job and which eventually improves employee’s performance. Performance of employees has been predominant for quite a period due to the practice that associates with pay.

Research objectives

To ascertain the influence of autonomy on performance of employees in Machakos County Government.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was anchored on equity theory and which was developed by John Stacey Adams in 1963. The theory states that employees will weigh their input into a job against the output they receive from it and therefore the more the rewards, the greater their satisfaction as postulated in the equity theory. This resonates with Naveed, Usman and Bushra (2011) ^[10] definition of satisfaction of job as the difference between job output and input of the employee. Concerning the equity theory, employees who perceive that they get more output from their jobs than what they put into, they then experience satisfaction of the job. The job itself also shapes how the worker perceives it and this is because of certain aspects in the job. Clarified tasks led to good satisfaction of the job as roles which are clear raises a work force that is committed, happy and which demonstrates greater participation in the job being done. Autonomy, skills variety involved in a task, feedback, the identity and significance of the task are some of the major job characteristics identified by the authors that impact on the psychological state of an employee and influence their job satisfaction, motivation as well as their absenteeism levels. Critics argued that persons might perceive equity/inequity not only in terms of the specific inputs and outcomes of a relationship, but also in terms of the overarching system that determines those inputs and outputs. According to Badubi (2017) ^[2], workers will experience satisfaction if they perceive that their input-outcome ratio with that of other workers is being fair. Employees become dissatisfied and less motivated when they perceive an inequity in their input-outcome ratio compared to other employees. Assumptions of the theory is that workers expect an equitable and fair

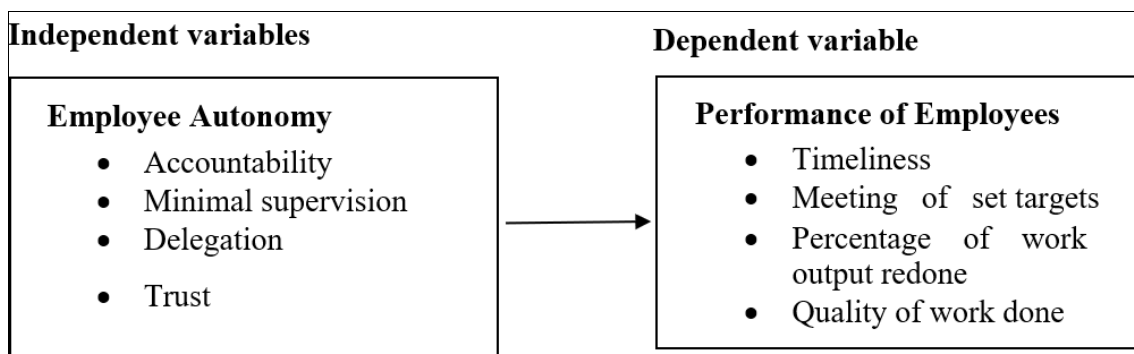
returns for contributing towards their job. This theory is relevant to the study because when employees are given the freedom to work on their own they tend to perform better and give good results than when they are being supervised by their managers. Therefore this leads to improved performance of the employees hence attaining organizational goals.

2.2 Empirical Review

Employee’s autonomy has a direct relationship with job contentment that takes place due to their empowerment in their organizations. It leads employees to feel free and have control of the organization resources and also has beneficial effects for the employees for a long period of time. An organization’s great value is which led persons to focus on career building by way of empowering employees. According to Ngamau (2016) ^[12], creating satisfaction of job from the first feeling that workers are enabled normally makes effect on each other arrangement over the time that the organization is operating and it’s the best thing that could experience from an organization. Also, employees who enjoy regular contacts with their managers, have the capability of swaying institutional and departmental decisions. Motivating employees in order for them to think strategically in what ways organizational performance can remain enhanced as a method of building strong business, then managers must be willing to listen to the direct input from the employees. Further, transforming organizational culture using influence of the opinion that the institution embrace true empowerment. For example, managers in organizations are required to change their understanding that a number of authorities they own need be known to the lower level workers. Ncube (2012) ^[11], executives must go on offering services that are of value to the organization and the workers at all levels ought to realize that just by having professions they are being entitled to their work; in culture of innovation.

Minimal supervision as a reward in a place of work enable employees to please the employer in all ways as well as developing confidence for delivering and its considered as an important method for compensating workers. Dobre (2013) ^[5] states that 70% of those institutions declared to as outstanding managers have at all times utilized worker autonomy to reward workers in their organizations so as to inspire them. In the area of incentive usage and job satisfaction always have displayed a positive relationship between the two components out of the majority studies that have been conducted.

2.3 Conceptual frame work



3. Research Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey research design, because it allowed a systematic and well-ordered description which was reliable, accurate as well as valid according to Jansen (2010) ^[6], and for that reason the method was well thought-out as appropriate for this study. Inferential statistics was used to draw conclusions about the population from the sample taken.

3.2 Target Population

The study targeted 520 employees of Machakos County Government, constituting of top level, middle and lower level employees was the target population for this study. The top management and the other levels of employees were targeted in this study as they were considered for having suitable information as per the study requirements. This was because the management was the one directly involved in defining the kind of training to be given to the workers and the middle and the lower level workers were the ones affected directly by the training the organization rewards its employees.

Table 1: Target population

Employee Levels	Number of Employees	Percentage
Top Level Employees	40	7.7
Middle Level Employees	150	28.9
Lower Level Employees	330	63.4
Total	520	100

Source: Human Resource Department (2022) of Machakos County Government.

3.2 Data collection instruments

Questionnaires and personal interviews were used in this study. Likert scale, close-ended and open-ended questions were in the semi structured questionnaire. Likert scale normally were important in ensuring that the objectives of the study were evaluated comprehensively and they could also give the respondents statements of a wide scope developing from the literary conversation, where they are expected to agree or disagree. Close ended type of questions simply agree to particular kinds of answers like Yes or No, whereas in the open ended questions, respondents stretch answers according to their individual thinking. Owing to the detail that they are very reasonable in relation to energy, time as well as money and since they are normally in their immediate serviceable form they are capable of enabling an easier analyzing, hence for this study questionnaires and personal interviews were preferred. The respondents finally gave suitable evidence required in the study because the questionnaires usually offer encouragement in a manner that deliver a thorough and felt reply as well as personal interviews could provide historical information.

3.3 Data Analysis and Presentation

Descriptive and Inferential statistics was used in this study to analyze data. Standard deviations, means, percentages and frequencies were used as the statistical tools for analyzing data. Data collected was examined thoroughly and checked for comprehensiveness. Data affirmed was coded as well as entered into the STATA version 17. The processed data was then presented in form of tables.

4. Data Analysis and Presentation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the assessment of influence of autonomy on performance of employees in Machakos County Government. The data was analyzed using the STATA version 17, by use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. Regression model was used to estimate coefficient of the variable in the objective.

4.2 Response rate

A total of 156 questionnaires were distributed to Machakos County workers categorized into top level employees, middle level employees and lower level employees. Out of the questionnaires distributed, 126 were collected leading to a representation of 81 percent. Only two were found not properly filled and therefore, were dropped. This represented an overall successful response rate of 79 percent. Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) ^[9] avers that a response rate of 50% or more is acceptable for conducting estimation. Maxfield (2015) ^[8] corroborates Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) ^[9] assertion by showing that return rates of 50 percent are acceptable for analysis and publication.

Table 2: Response rate

Response	Total	Percent
Returned and correctly filled	124	79.5
Unreturned	30	19.2
Returned but poorly filled	2	1.3
Total	156	100

4.2 Employment cadre

Table 3 presents findings concerning the employment cadre of the respondents.

Table 3: Employment cadre

Employment cadre	Frequency	Percent
Top Management Staff	35	28.23
Middle Level Staff	63	50.81
Lower level Staff	26	20.97
Total	124	100.00

The results in Table 3 showed that majority of the respondents that is 50.81 percent were middle level employment. The top level staff and lower level staff accounted for 28.23 percent and 20.97 percent of the total respondents respectively. This shows that in the study the middle level staff of the respondents were able to respond the most to the questionnaires as they were directly affected by the reward of autonomy offered by their employer.

4.4 Descriptive statistics

This section presents the descriptive results of assessment of autonomy as a non-monetary incentive on performance of employees in MACHAKOS County government.

Effects of autonomy on employee performance of MACHAKOS county government

The study sought to establish whether employee autonomy influence employee performance in Machakos County government. The responses were rated on a Likert scale and the results presented in table 4.

Table 4: Effects of autonomy on employee performance

Employee Autonomy	Percentage (%)						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Allowing employees to be accountable in their work improves performance	20.16	23.39	12.10	34.68	9.68	3.10	1.33
Minimal supervision at work improves employee performance	33.06	44.35	12.90	2.42	7.26	3.94	1.10
Delegating work to employees improves their performance	26.61	37.90	19.35	7.26	8.87	3.66	1.20
Trusting employees with work improves their performance	32.26	29.84	19.35	10.48	8.06	3.68	1.25
Average						3.60	1.22

Table 4 above revealed that the mean for this statement was 3.60 implying that most respondents were in agreement with this statement that employee autonomy improves their performance. The standard error for the variable was 1.22 meaning that responses were not the same as it could be zero had the respondents indicated similar responses. Similarly, the results indicated that majority that is about 23.39 percent of the respondents indicated that allowing employees to be accountable in their work improves performance. In addition, about 44 percent of the respondents agreed that minimal supervision at work improves employee performance. The study also established that 8.87 percent of respondents strongly disagreed that delegating work to employees improves their performance. However, about 38 percent were in agreement that delegation improves employee performance. The study also found that 32.26 percent of the respondent agreed strongly that trusting employees with work can improve performance of workers.

4.5 Regression analysis and hypothesis testing

Regression analysis was conducted so as to quantify the influence of autonomy on the employee performance of Machakos County government. The effect of the variable on autonomy was assessed by conducting bivariate regression analyses. Finding out the isolated effect of autonomy on employee performance was crucial given the fact that the effectiveness of the variable in influencing employee performance of Machakos County was quite different. In this case, the mean of responses for employee performance of Machakos County government for all respondents were regressed against the mean of responses for employee autonomy for all the respondents as well. The following hypothesis was formulated and tested; H₀₂: Autonomy of employee for their good work has no significant influence on the Machakos county government employee performance. From the bivariate regression analysis conducted, three outputs were generated as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Autonomy of employee and employee performance

Model 2	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared		Root MSE		
	0.3868	0.3818		0.77525		
ANOVA						
Model 2		Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	46.25	1	46.25	76.95	0.0000
	Residual	73.32	122	0.601		
	Total	119.57	123			
Dependent Variable: Employee Performance						
Predictor: Employee Autonomy						
Coefficients						
Model 2		Coefficients	Std. Error	t	Sig.	
	Constant	-3.70	0.0696	-0.00	1.000	
	Employee Autonomy	0.528	0.0602	8.77	0.000	

1. Model Summary

The model summary results provided by the first output in Table 5 showed that employee autonomy explained a substantial proportion of the variance in the employee performance of Machakos County government. This finding is supported by the coefficient of determination or adjusted R Squared of 0.3818 which implied that 38.18% of the changes in the employee performance of Machakos County government under study were attributed to changes in the employee autonomy.

2. Goodness of Fit

The model fitness results presented as the second output in Table 5 were also evaluated in order to determine the significance of the model that was used to show the relationship between the employee autonomy and the employee performance of Machakos County government. The aim was to check whether the model fit the data used or how well it would predict a future set of observations. The calculated F statistic and its associated p value (significance

value) were assessed where a p value less than 0.05 was an indication that the model was significant, otherwise insignificant. The results obtained, therefore, showed that the model used was statistically significant in predicting the relationship between the two study variables given (F=76.95, p=0.000, p<0.05).

3. Regression Coefficient

The third output in Table 5 showed the regression estimate (β coefficient) computed that assisted in determining if employee autonomy significantly influenced the Machakos county government employee performance by observing its associated t statistic and p value. The findings demonstrated that autonomy of employee had a positive significant influence on the employee performance given (β = 0.528, t = 8.29, p = 0.000, p<0.05). These results meant that a unit improvement in the employee autonomy would result to improved employee performance of Machakos county government by 0.528 units when all other factors were held constant. Given that the calculated p value was 0.000 was

less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) was thus rejected and an inference made that the employee autonomy had a significant influence on the employee performance of Machakos County government.

These findings compare with the sentiments of most of the respondents who noted that this employee autonomy influenced their performance at work. With regards to previous studies, the findings were in support of the observation by Ajala (2012) ^[1] which found that employee autonomy influences employee performance. The author studied the influence of employee autonomy on staff productivity using a sample drawn from the Somalands Ministry of Finance headquarters.

Based on the regression estimates generated, the following optimal model was fitted;

$$Y = -3.70 + 0.528 X_2$$

Where Y= employee performance in Machakos County government and X_2 is employee autonomy.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to ascertain the influence of autonomy on performance of employees in Machakos County Government. The study concluded that there was a strong relationship between employee autonomy and performance. This implies that a higher percentage of employees require independence to perform better in line with organizational expectations. Accordingly, it follows that independence on the part of most workers is essential if they are to meet the requirements of their jobs. The study's findings on the correlation between trusting workers with more responsibility and higher productivity were unsurprising. This result corroborated the claims of Chiniara and Bentein (2016) ^[3], who argued that giving workers more autonomy at work increases both contentment and, by extension, productivity.

The research also found that giving workers more freedom in their work increased their job contentment, boosted their productivity, and made them more likely to stay with the county. This finding lent credence to Waqas and Saleem (2014) ^[16] contention that satisfying workers' higher needs and meta-needs are the only way to get them not to quit their jobs and that reducing the number of oversight workers receive at work is one of the most effective ways to motivate them to do a good job and keep their employers happy.

The study indicated that the degree of autonomy offered to workers significantly affects their productivity and performance. Many individuals are affected more by non-monetary than monetary reasons, as stated (Waqas & Saleem, 2014) ^[16]. It was also found that employees who have a sense of autonomy at work are satisfied with their jobs. Employees who have frequent interactions with their managers are more likely to be able to offer solutions and have input into the direction of their departments and the county as a whole. Employees who get less direct supervision from their superiors are more likely to be motivated to do their best work and satisfy their employers. This jived with research by Markos and Sridevi (2010) ^[7] and Van (2013) ^[15], which concluded that boosting employees' autonomy and a sense of purpose at work might improve their job satisfaction. Van (2013) ^[15] argues that as

employees advance in their careers, their importance of being empowered to make decisions grows. Building on early sentiments of empowerment and becoming more influential over time is vital to an established employee's sense of job satisfaction.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that Kenya's government institute labor rules prioritizing workers' autonomy inside their firms over monetary compensation. In addition, this study recommends that employers to capitalize on non-monetary benefits by giving employees room for autonomy at work.

The study recommends that potential investors in the County help develop strategies for improved employee performance by taking into account the fact that workers may prefer autonomy in their work.

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