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Training of Human Resource and Project Performance by Meru County Government, Kenya

By

Edna Eleanor Mugure Limiri
University of Nairobi

*Corresponding email: elmugure@yahoo.com

&

Dr. Kirema Nkanata Mburugu
University of Embu
P.O Box 6-60100
Embu, Kenya

Abstract

People are an integral part of the success of any project. Human capital is a resource that provides competitive advantage to any project. This article sought to empirically evaluate the influence training of human resource on performance of development projects by Meru County government. The focus was on Meru County because the researcher being a resident of the county wanted to establish the influence of training as a human resource practice in their county on the performance of projects. Descriptive cross sectional survey research design was used in the study. The target population was employees of departments dealing with development projects in Meru County. From the target population of 320 a sample of 179 was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data was obtained using self-administered questionnaires. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS (version 25). The study found out that training is effectively carried out to help achieve new skills for the project work, which the organization has effective on job training techniques for ongoing projects work and training is conducted on skills gap of employees in projects. The study found out that training of human resource had a statistically significant influence on performance of development projects. It recommends that training of human resource to impart them with the necessary project management knowledge and skills is vital for optimal performance of projects initiated by county governments.

Key words: Kenya, Meru, Training, Human Resource, Project Performance

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1.0 Introduction

Human resource management is composed of policies, practices and systems that influence performance. In every project in an organization, there are specific human resource practices that are put in place to ensure the success of the project. One of these practices is training of human resource. Training is significantly related to positive project performance. Effectively implementing training in an organization has a major positive impact on the performance of projects within the organization (Osman, *et al*, 2011). In the 1990s, the concept of human resource management practices became popular and started attracting studies. Mailed surveys analyzed the relationship between training as human resource practices and project performance. With a sample of 94 manufacturing firms in the South Western states of USA, the results indicated that training had implications on how projects perform. In 2009, Kenya Petroleum Refineries limited came top in the company of the year award for practicing best human resource practices. The awards are organized annually by the Kenya Institute of management to recognize companies that exhibit exemplary management and leadership practices. It was recognized for on the job training as one of the best practices among others. In Meru County, the government has been undertaking several development projects in agriculture, education, infrastructure and provision of water for residents. The success of any of these projects is to an extent determined by the human resource practices involved in the implementation process, training being one of the practices. Managing human resource as well as other resources influences the performance of these projects. Some of these projects, however, do not perform as expected. There is the need to establish how training contributes to the performance of each of these projects. Although training may have a positive effect on project performance, more conceptual and empirical work is required to establish the same. It is on this background that the researcher sought to establish the influence of training on project performance in Meru County.

Project management is the discipline of planning, organizing, motivating and controlling resources to achieve specific goals. A project on the other hand is a temporary endeavor with a defined beginning and end (usually time-constrained, and often constrained by funding or deliverables), undertaken to meet unique goals and objectives (Bradley, 2016). Project management practices require that managers have knowledge and experience in management and leadership so as to ensure project success (Berg & Karlsen, 2007). In a development project environment, it is imperative for managers and employees to ensure that tasks and duties are completed, and ought to be sensitive to the needs of people. Integrating leadership concepts allows project managers to apply logic and analytical skills to project activities and tactics.

Statement of the Problem

For projects to survive in a global economy, there is need for them to utilize all the available human resources to achieve a competitive advantage, be useful to the intended clients while at the same time ensuring sustainability. Human capital such as ability, skills and technological knowhow must be aligned with the needs of the project to improve performance of the project.

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Training has an impact on project performance, and thus is a central research question in the personnel field and there is need to carry out this study to establish the influence training on project performance.

The influence training on project performance has been an area of research in developed countries for years but very few studies have been conducted on training in developing countries (Sarbariya, 2011). Conducting this study in developing countries will therefore act as a tool for comparative studies. It is therefore important to carry out the study to establish the relationship between training and project performance in developing countries.

Indeed, training is practiced by the management of Meru county government but it is not known how it influences performance. It is upon this background, therefore that this study seeks to establish the influence of training on project performance by Meru County government. This study also seeks to determine to what extent best training practices contribute to the achievement of project goals in Meru County.

2.0 Literature Review

Training and development is any endeavor to develop current or future employee by growing an employee's aptitude to perform through learning, usually by changing the employees' attitude or increasing his or her skills and knowledge (Armstrong, 2010). Training is seen to be the process of imparting specific skills designed to help employees grow. A study done by (Armstrong, 2010) indicates that training is the formal and systematic alteration of behavior through learning which occurs as a result of education, coaching, development and planned experience. Training and development programs even in the form of orientations, inductions and familiarization activities also impact on project performance (Quansah, 2013). For training and development programs to have a rewarding impact on project performance, its design and delivery should be well executed. Well trained and developed employees identify and are committed to their organizations. On the other hand, inadequate training resulting in poor performance reviews can create employee dissatisfaction and conflict (Quansah, 2013). This study therefore seeks to establish whether there is optimal human capital development and how it influences performance of projects.

A study by Jotham (2013) on human resource factors influencing project performance in international non-governmental organizations in Kenya, a case of management science of health, found out that there exists a significant level of association between training and development and project performance in an organization. This is so since promotion within an organization is dependent on employee skills and experience. A clear employee skills development plan that strikes a balance by focusing on both employee career development and organization performance is necessary in an organization.

By studying the employee recruitment, retention, and performance strategies in the Nigerian civil service, Gbervbie (2010) emphasized the importance of adopting appropriate employee training strategies to improve project performance. In today's rapidly changing socio-economic environment, where the importance of competencies and skills acquired and refined has been widely recognized (Gove, 2012). New professionals may, therefore, require the same in order to continuously improve on their productivity. Others may however need it for a specific purpose such as the development of a new service. In a situation of less development people need training even more because if a job becomes drudgery, it cannot be performed effectively (Gottelmann-Duret & Bahr, 2012). It is therefore important to train people to equip them with skills and competencies relevant to the project.

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The ILO report (2008) points out that training for new skills gives opportunity for better career paths within the project, higher income and employability. In addition, it is recognized that new skills are required for projects to remain competitive and be able to retain their workers. Cheng and Ho (2001) indicate that adequate training produces marked improvements in employee communication and proficiency of performances as well as extending retention time. A study carried out by Karia & Asaari, (2006) revealed that training and education have been shown to have a significant positive effect on job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Training must have a purpose and this purpose can be defined only if the learning needs of workers, groups and individuals within an organization have been systematically identified and analyzed.

Research further shows that individuals with a learning orientation seek challenges that provide them with learning opportunities. Gong (2009) has pointed out his study that managers play a great role in building employees' creativity in work place. Managers need to create conditions for the learning orientation to take hold and bring forth creativity. They are also instrumental in providing an environment that stimulates and nourishes creative self-efficacy. They need to serve as creative models; they can instruct their employees on creativity-relevant skills and provide hands-on opportunity to apply these skills. Creativity is significant since it provides opportunity to learn new skills and hence improve on employee productivity. Training should be viewed as an investment, however for projects; training is an enormous cost and will require a return on investment. This return on investment relies on various factors, including employees' motivation to attend the training sessions, which are also dependent on multiple factors such as; time, location and relevance of the training. If the employees are motivated it's highly likely that they will have a positive perception of surroundings training in the project (Newman, Thanacoody and Hui, 2011). Motivated employees are easy to train and it finally reflects on the performance of projects.

Mutsotso, (2010) points out that education and training increase employees' job skills, and their perception towards efficiency and effectiveness in carrying their operations. It further causes employees to exhibit higher feelings of satisfaction, motivation and consequently increase in production. This therefore means projects that have high capacity building are likely to experience increased performance characterized by a motivated workforce. Skills building initiatives are very important to employees. Hameed, (2011) note that the skills building activities performed by projects indicates that the organization cares for its employees. While many organizations invest in their employees, the employees on the other hand derive job satisfaction from their work which in turn leads to increased project performance.

Adeniji *et al*, (2013) in his study asserts that training can help solve performance problems by explaining the details of the job. The workplace ethics training assists the company realizes its goals as set in the strategic plan. Apart from the set company goals, training also instills on the employees the impetus to have self-set goals. Such self-set goals are effective for the enhancement of job attendance (Latham & Budworth, 2006). Liao & Teng, (2010) conducted a study on "The Relationship between Ethics Training, employee satisfaction and gender balance: A Mediator of Corporate Responsibility Practices". The study examined the mediating role of social corporate responsibility practices on the relationship between ethics training, gender balance and employee satisfaction. Their finding indicated that ethics training positively influenced social corporate responsibility practices and that these practices positively influenced employee satisfaction.

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2.1 Theoretical Framework

The resource based theory of HRM was applied as the theoretical underpinning of this study. This theory draws attention to the strategic value of the workforce and to the issues of workplace learning. Thus, it appears to embrace a soft view of HRM from Penrose (1959) who conceptualized the firm as a collection of productive resources. Penrose distinguishes between physical and human resources and draw attention to the issues of learning including knowledge and experience of the management team. According to Armstrong, (1999) resource based theory recognizes that the strategic capability of a firm depends on its resource capability, specifically the human resources.

The underlined principle of this theory is that resources are the fundamental forces in HRM and particularly the human resources and managers are accentuated to understand the immerging trends of knowledge, learning and learning organizations. Resource based theory specifies the postulation that caliber and human talents have to be developed and utilized for achieving both organizational and personnel objectives a very success.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive cross sectional survey research design. The target population was 320 people comprising of the management and employees of departments that deal with development projects in Meru County government. To determine the sample size, Slovin's formula was used to give a sample size of respondents.

$$n = \{N / (1 + Ne^2)\}$$

Where

n = number of samples

N = total population

e = 0.05 (margin of error)

$$n = \{320 / (1 + 315 * 0.05^2)\}$$

n = 179 respondents

Thus the sample size for this study was 179 respondents

This study employed stratified sampling technique in order to ensure that all subgroups in the population were included in the study. Stratified random sampling technique is cited as having increased sample's statistical efficiency and provides adequate data for analyzing the various sub population (Cooper & Schinder, 2014). To ensure adequate representation, the population was first clustered in three main categories i.e. top level managers, middle level managers and employees. Primary data was obtained using self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaire was made up of both open ended and closed ended questions. The open-ended questions enabled the researcher to collect sufficient qualitative data since the respondents gave an in depth response without being held back. The closed ended questions allowed the respondents give data from the limited options given.

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4.0 Findings and Discussions

This section displays findings and discussions of the study.

4.1 Response rate

The target respondents for the study were 179, and response was 176 as presented in Table 1

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents		Response Rate
Response	176	98.3%
Non-response	3	1.7%
Total	179	100

The questionnaire return rate was 98.3% which was considered satisfactory as per studies by Jack (2008) and Creswell and Creswell (2017) who said that response rate of 60% and above in a survey is satisfactory.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

This section outlines descriptive statistics of project performance and training of human resource.

4.2.1 Performance of County Projects

The respondents were requested to indicate their response on various statements linked to training of human resource using a 1-5 Likert scale where 1= strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=strongly agree. The findings are as shown in Table 2

Table 2: Aspects of project performance for county projects

Statements	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
Completed project on time	10.2	22.1	21.6	23.9	10.8	3.827	1.049
Completed project within the agreed cost	9.7	37.5	15.9	10.2	26.7	4.164	0.727
Delivering a project to the agreed scope	18.2	51.7	10.2	9.6	10.2	2.678	0.588
Product acceptance and impact on the customer or end user	10.8	45.4	13.6	12.5	17.6	4.340	0.753
Effect of the project on the community to move and prepare for the future	6.2	34	21.6	16.5	21.6	3.829	0.953

From the findings presented in Table 2, majority of the respondents as indicated by 23.9% agreed that projects were completed on time. Further majority of respondents as illustrated by 37.5% of response disagreed with the statement that projects were completed within the cost. This means that projects initiated by county governments overran their budgets. On delivering a project to the agreed scope, majority of the respondents indicated by 51.7% disagreed with the on delivering a project to the agreed scope. Further majority of respondents as indicated

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by 45.4 % of the respondents disagreed with the statement that that Product acceptance and impact on the customer or end user was achieved. Finally, majority of respondents as illustrated by 21.6% of response, were neutral that the effect of the project on the community to move and prepare for the future. In the overall it is clear that projects initiated by the county government have a low performance according the respondents.

4.2.2 Training of Human Resource

The respondents were requested to indicate their agreement with various statements linked to training of human resource using a 1-5 Likert scale ((1= strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=strongly agree). The findings are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Training of human resource

Statements	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Training is conducted on skills gap of employees in projects	4.5	10.2	20.4	30.1	34.7	3.833	0.916
The organization has effective on job training techniques for ongoing projects work	4.5	17.0	10.2	33.5	34.7	2.861	0.347
Training is conducted on skills gap of employees in projects	4.5	10.2	20.4	30.1	34.7	4.021	0.865
Training meets employees learning and development needs	1.1	5.1	25	33.0	35.8	3.611	0.489
Training ensures optimal human capital development for the purpose of the projects	4.5	17	10.2	33.5	34.7	4.092	0.729
The training builds project management and leadership skills for strong team	1.1	25	10.8	24.4	32.9	2.866	0.351
Training is effectively carried out to help achieve new skills for the project work	4	6.3	14.2	33	42.6	3.615	0.495

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that 34.7 % of respondents strongly agreed that Training is effectively carried out to help achieve new skills for the project work, while 34.7% of respondents strongly agreed that the organization has effective on job training techniques for ongoing projects work. Further, 34.7 % of respondents strongly agreed training is conducted on skills gap of employees in projects, while on the fact that training ensures optimal human capital development for the purpose of the projects, 35.8% of the respondents strongly agreed to that, while 32.9% strongly agreeing that training builds project

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management and leadership skills for strong team. Finally, 42.6% of the respondents strongly agreed that training is effectively carried out to help achieve new skills for the project work.

4.3 Inferential Statistics

The inferential statistics conducted in this study are Pearson’s correlation Analysis and Regression Analysis.

4.3.1 Pearson’s Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength and the direction of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. The findings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Person’s Correlation Results

		Perfor mance of Meru County Project s
Performance of Meru County Projects	Pearson Correlation	1
Training	Pearson Correlation	.617
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029

Pearson’s correlations analysis was conducted at 95% confidence interval and 5% confidence level 2-tailed. Table 4 indicates the correlation matrix between training as a human resource practice and performance of projects in Meru County. As per the results on there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between performance of projects in Meru County and training as shown by $r^2 = 0.617$ P-value 0.29.

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4.3.2 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted as to determine the relationship between training of staff and projects performance in Meru County. The findings are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.864	0.749	0.741	1.397

From the findings on Table 5, the adjusted R^2 was used to establish the predictive power of the study model and it was found to be 0.741 implying that 74.1% of the variations in performance of projects in Meru County are explained by quality of training offered.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Beta	T	Sig
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	1.768	0.125		13.998	.000
Training	0.838	0.354	0.874	2.393	.022

The regression equation obtained from this outcome was: -

$$Y = 0.125 + 0.354X_1 \text{ Where}$$

Y= Performance of projects by Meru County

X_1 = Training

From the findings in Table 6, the performance of projects in Meru County was 0.125. The coefficient on training of staff was 0.354, which was considered significant given the p value is 0.022 and is less than the accepted value of 0.05 translating to the fact that training of staff leads to 0.874 change in unit in project performance in Meru county. It is imperative therefore that project performance in Meru County is influenced by training of employees.

These findings agree with those of a study carried out by Karia & Asaari (2006) revealed that training and education have been shown to have a significant positive effect on job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. On the other hand, inadequate training resulting in poor performance reviews can create employee dissatisfaction and conflict. These findings support studies by Beardwell and Claydon (2007) who mentioned that all employees want to be valuable and remain competitive in the labor market at all times. They further argued that, it can only be achieved through employee training and development. Employees will always want to develop career-enhancing skills, which will always lead to employee motivation and retention. There is no doubt that a well-trained and developed staff will be a valuable asset to the project and thereby increasing the chances of his efficiency in discharging his or her duties. Training and development are activities that are used to maintain and promote the competencies and talents of employees in relation to the developments inside and outside the project.

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5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that training is intended to achieve new skills and bridge skills gap for the county government when it targets existing staff. For new staff, training is conducted to orient them on the county government expectation and on how to achieve it. Training also helps in imparting better management and leadership skills for employees, while making career development a better journey for professionals. Training is thus an effective way that helps one overcome project challenges, motivate employees and enhance project performance.

6.0 Recommendation

The county government should engage policy makers to help come up with employee policy on training and development that is applicable for all pool of project employees. The study recommends that training should not be the sole role under human resource management; instead the county government of Meru should engage experts in various project fields to ensure the achievements of its employees are always in competitive edge in their ability to accomplish tasks given to them efficiently and effectively thus better project performance.

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