

## **INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE VOICE ON PERFORMANCE OF MAKUENI COUNTY GOVERNMENT, KENYA**

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**Abstract:** *The main objective of the study was to investigate the influence of employee voice on organization performance of Makueni County Government. The theoretical premise of the study was based on Goal setting theory. The study adopted descriptive research design and targeted all 3000 permanent employees in ranks of senior management, middle management, lower management and general staff in the County Government of Makueni. Stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain 10% to a sample size of 300 respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires which were physically availed to the sample population. The study also adopted correlation and multiple regression analysis at 0.05% level of significance that determined the strength and direction of the relationship of the variables. Findings of the study indicated that the employee voice influenced organizational performance in the county government of Makueni in Kenya. The research concluded that county governments should put in place and develop a sound organizational communicational policy that would enhance interpersonal communication and relationship between seniors and juniors in order to voice their matters.*

**Keywords:** *Employee Voice, Employee participation, organization performance*

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### **Introduction**

Employee voice has increasingly becoming important in the modern workplace. Having a voice was crucial for organizations and much as for the employee. Voice was one of the enablers of employee engagement and it significantly impacted on performance. But employee voice remained both little understood as a concept and under-utilized in the world of work, (Anyango, 2015). According to (Boxall & Purcell, 2016), employee voice entailed various kinds of opening where employees could air their views and influenced workplace decisions. Employees were able to speak up on important issues, within an organization.

Fostering employee voice is considered one of the most important factors in achieving employee motivation. And commitment. It ensures employee involvement from planning to decision making in a modern way Organizational process. Existing research emphasizes the importance of open communication systems for organizations to survive and prosper in dynamic business competition (Jha et al., 2019; Ruck et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2013; Qi et al., 2014).

According to Gonzalez (2019), employee voice was defined in different ways; firstly there was the individual dissatisfaction that was usually brought up by line managers or through grievance procedures; the second definition states that it was an expression of collective dissatisfaction voiced by trade unions through collective bargaining or industrial action; third definition was that it was a contribution to management decision making

process through communicating upwards, problem solving, suggestion schemes and attitude surveys; and finally, through collective and mutual partnership agreements, joint consultative committees and work councils. According to Morrison (2014), employee voice was discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve employee performance and successful organization. According to Kagaari, (2013), participation is another mode that employees used to speak up. It is demonstrated when an employee plays a greater role in the decision making process. Management have to give employees the opportunity to influence management decisions, where the staff can contribute to the improvement of organizational performance. According to Biswas (2007), Involvement, is when management allowed employees to discuss matters that touched on them in order to enhance organizational commitment. Direct participation takes place in self-determination, and goal setting plans by individuals, while at departmental level employees are formed into quality circles, and work-in-groups. At the organizational level, the use of dialogue conference where employees are invited to offer their input to the planning and realization of the organization's strategy is widely used. Indirect participation can be in form of unions where employees are represented (Juan, Loch, Daradoumis, & Ventura 2017).

According to Kubaison, (2015), most common forms of direct participation include employee attitude surveys, problem solving groups' quality circles and decision making work teams. New forms of participation like briefing groups, suggestion schemes are embedded in a term employee involvement or employee empowerment. Employees are also done through communication channels within an organization (Juan *et al.*, 2017). Armstrong, (2009) cites the conceptualization mode of participation which particularly identify all the relevant aspects of voice. This is done through four factors i.e. The degree of involvement, the cycle of influence of decisions open to workers, the level at which workers (or their representatives) were involved in management decisions, and the different forms of voice. Several studies carried in UK, Australia and Canada revealed several ways of how employee voice was expressed; voice as communication and exchange of ideas. Through collective consultation processes, upward problem solving which was a chance for workers to give their feedback on certain topics. These matters were not as a dialogue but as a way of providing ideas to increase employee performance in the organization, (Ojukuku & Sayuigbe, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Nowadays, organizations want to ensure their long-term viability in order to keep ahead of their competitors. It is impossible for organizations to remain competitive with workers who merely obey orders and do not contribute to the organization through feedback mechanisms. Um-e-Rubbab and Naqvi (2020). Voice behavior is paramount to organizational innovation (Zhou, Feng & Liu, 2017). Organization employees do not engage in verbal behavior and tend to withhold information. Low employee commitment and motivation (Agnihotri, 2017). Voice is thereby a mechanism Employees can help organizations adapt to and maintain their current business environment Innovative (Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012). Makueni County however, face challenges that require innovative solutions as the County strives to deliver service to its residents including quality of the human resources. While the Constitution of Kenya 2010, has created a new reform space for more responsive, equitable, efficient and accountable local service delivery, converting these efforts into actual transformation in Makueni County will largely depend on the quality and capacity of human capital charged with various responsibilities (Ndegwa, 2014). It is thus from the above matters that the study souht to demonstrate how employee voice on overall performance of the county. Oyugi (2015) indicates that the performance of the public workforce in counties is below 50%. It also ranks Kenya as one of the 57 countries in the world with a serious crisis in public workforce. This concerns of the public workforce compromises performance and ultimately development of a nation. According to study Mwinzi (2019) in his M.A thesis paper, Makueni

County has been facing critical encounters that are hampering employee productivity including; Inadequate number of skilled public workforce and skill mismatch, worker's unrest, unsatisfied staff, lack of clarity in promotions, unfairness, low staffing levels, lack of HR development among others. However, voice behavior has received comparatively little attention in the management field. While proactive behavior theory has identified the mechanism through which voice takes place, there is scant research on the antecedents and consequences of employee voice behavior in Makueni county Kenya.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study sought to determine the influence of employee voice on performance of Makueni County Government.

### **Value of the Research**

The current study intended to provide insights into knowledge about employee voice on performance. The study will contribute towards filling the gap in the body of knowledge in the practices and operations of county governments in Kenya. The study intends to establish a link between employee voice on performance, namely staff involvement.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Theoretical Foundation of the research***

#### **Goal Setting Theory**

The theory was advanced by (Locke & Latham, 2012); who emphasized goal setting and encouragement of decision rights and employee voice as a basis for employee performance. According to (Kagaari, 2010), the scholar emphasized that taking responsibility for results required that organizational members are given the opportunity to influence their results favourably and have the freedom to take action. This implied that people had to be authorized by their managers to independently and swiftly take action on problems without having to ask for permission first. The contributions of individuals and teams through team based participation schemes in organizations are a starting point for enumerating the results for which they are accountable (Armstrong, 2009). The study established that goal setting theory was important in supporting employee voice and specifically employee participation and involvement. It was also established that the theory was most appropriate especially where the county senior managers involved employees in the strategic decisions like recruitment and selection, reward and compensation systems and training practices activities and policy making before implementation.

#### **Empirical Literature Review**

#### **Influence of Employee Voice on organizational Performance**

According to Mueller (2012), employee voice in organizations impacted on quality and productivity of employees and inhibited issues that might explode. When employee voice was embraced in organizations wholly, it superseded the reporting collective schemes. Therefore it was important that the extent of speaking up of employees within an organization be known as it was believed to affect their performance. According to Purcell, J. (2013) employee voice took the form of joint consultation which involved managers and employee representatives meeting on a regular basis for exchange of views, made good use of members' knowledge and expertise and dealt with matters of common interest. Therefore trade unions in organizations represented the workers and their grievances in management meetings.

Anyango (2015) argued that employee voice was a way of making employees an integral part in the organization and it had a direct bearing on their performance. According to Ahmad, Rizvi, & Bokhari, (2017) when employees are treated as stakeholders in the organization, an outcome of improvement in performance was exhibited. Staff that had developed significant firm-specific human capital and had invested in the organization earned voice or were able to speak up on important issues just as shareholders. When employees are allowed to speak up on important issues in an organization, their performance positively improved as the speaking up provides a rationale for further emotional and human capital investment. Morrison, (2014) suggests that there existed a link between job satisfaction and employee voice. Scholars like Lazaro, (2015). brought to fore major areas that trade unions handled. These were matters relating to work environment which comprised staffing of employees, overtime and general working condition of staff in the organization. Other matters related to pay such as inequitable pay, inadequate benefits and noncompetitive pay. Unions also handled matters of unfair treatment, disciplinary issues, harassment and abusive treatment, job insecurity and lack of response to complaints. Finally they also addressed matters concerned with management style such as fear, intimidation of employees, and lack of recognition in decision making process. According to (Armstrong, 2009), Trade Unions had two major roles, namely; secured improved terms and conditions for their members and to provide protection, support and advice to their members as individual employees. The other roles included providing legal and financial services to members whenever appropriate. The voice exhibited in trade unions enhanced employee performance by bringing a conducive working atmosphere within an organization.

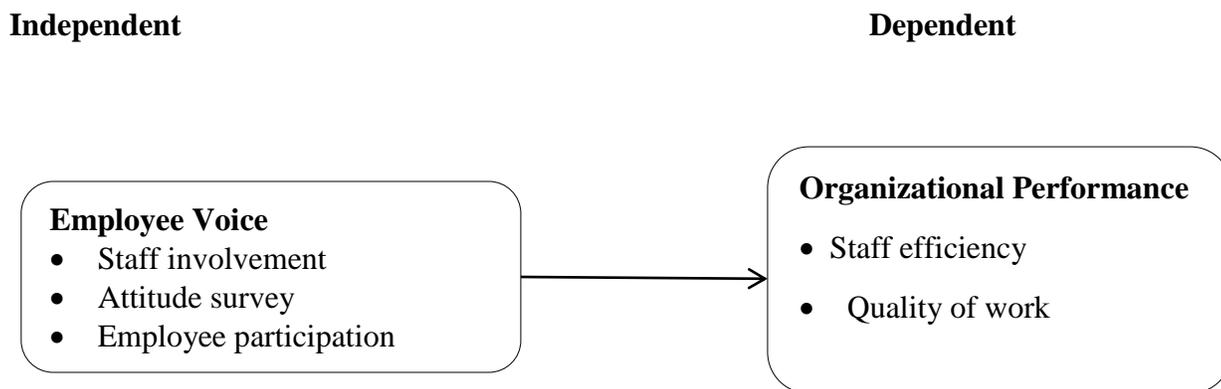
According to Barry & Wilkinson, (2016), when unions talk on issues that concerns staff, the matters voiced are used to develop rules that governed employees themselves. Employees normally joined or formed unions depending on the beneficial factors that were realised. The unions achieve better wages for members, improved working conditions which are beneficial to the unionisable members and boosted their satisfaction. According to (Armstrong, (2009), management are to believe in employees and involve them in key matters that concerned the organization.

Management can also use attitude surveys that gave information on what employees preferred, gave warning of potential problem areas and solved causes of issues. The tool can also be used to compare levels of job satisfaction. Attitude surveys examine a variety of attitudes and behaviours, such as beliefs, opinions, values expectations and satisfaction. Examples of surveys can be done through interviews, use of structured questionnaires, combination of questionnaires and interviews and also through focus groups (Gonzalez, 2019). Exploring employee attitudes at work is important in creating an environment that is conducive for staff motivation. This then translates into positive performance, (Kubaison *et al.*, 2015). Other modes of voice were Suggestion schemes. These were established procedures for employees that helped them submit ideas to management with tangible recognition for those suggestions with merit. They were known to reduce feelings of frustration where employees felt they had good ideas that were not recognized in the formal channel of communication, (Armstrong, 2009). Organizations however were advised to put in place committees that vetted suggestion in order to pick only what was appropriate (Armstrong, 2009).

### **Conceptual Frame Work**

Conceptual framework gives a diagrammatic representation of linkages or relationships between study variables, (Robson, 2011). Independent variables as indicated are the key driver or influences of the dependent variable and for this case it include; employee voice. The dependent variable in this study is the performance of Makueni County government in Kenya.

Fig 1. A Conceptual Model showing employee voice and organization performance



**Methodology**

**Research Design**

This study used descriptive survey research design. According to (Polit & Beck, 2013) in a descriptive study, researchers observe, count, delineate, and classify. In view of the above definitions, descriptions and strengths, descriptive survey was the most appropriate design for this study because it’s easy and convenient to be conducted through questionnaire instrument.

**Target Population**

According to Cooper and Schindler (2009) target population is a group of individual objects or items from which samples are taken for measurements. The target population for this study were 3000 employees of the county government of Makueni. The employees were drawn from different sections of the county government as indicated in their organizational structure. The respondents consisted of the senior management that includes the chief and deputy administrators, Middle management, lower management and general members of staff of the county government as listed on the table below.

**Sampling Technique and Size**

According to (Cooper & Schindler, 2018) Sampling technique is the procedure of selecting a sample population it ensured that the representation of the population was equitable. To allow views from the employees of the county government of Makueni in regards to the influence of employee voice on organization performance oat Makueni County to ensure that high quality information is obtained. Mugenda (2009), denotes that a sample of 10-30% of the population is suitable for a research to represent the entire population. Stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample size of 150 respondents out of 300 employees sampled. The ideal sample size should be large enough to achieve validity and reliability of data, (Wiersma, 2015).

Table 1: Sample Size.

Population Category	No of employees	10% sample size
Number of employees	3000	300

Source: (HR County Government of Makueni, 2020)

**Data collection**

Questionnaires were used to collect data. Polit & Beck, (2013) observes that use of questionnaires has several advantages including efficiency, standardized responses and easy analysis. The researchers sought authority from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) to collect data.

*Table 2: Reliability Test Results*

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Comment
Employee voice	0.882	15	Reliable
Organizational Performance	0.923	10	Reliable

**Source: Field Data (2022)**

**Response Rate**

In this study, out of a total of 300 questionnaires that were distributed, 150 of them were filled and returned. This made a response rate of 50%.

*Table 3: Response Rate*

category	Frequency	percentage
Returned	150	50%
Not returned	150	50%.
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

As indicated in table 3 above, from a sample size of 300 respondents, the response rate was 50%. The response rate was satisfactory and provided reliable results for the study. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), a 50% response rate is reliable for study results.

**Demographic Characteristics**

The respondent’s demographic characteristics including the respondent’s age, highest level of academic qualification, working experience in the county and their category was established and presented in Table 4.

*Table 4: Demographic Characteristics*

	Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Male	78	52.5
	Female	72	47.5
<b>Age</b>	Below 30 years	42	28.3
	30-40 years	72	55.0
	50-60 years	14	5.0
	Over 60 years	22	11.7
<b>Level of education</b>	secondary	15	4.2

	Middle College	22	10
	University	113	85.8
<b>Working Experience</b>	1-5 years	30	15.8
	5- 10 years	79	56.7
	Over 10yrs	41	27.5

**Source:** Field Data (2022)

According to the study findings, majority of the respondents were male 52.3% while female respondents were 47.5%. The study attributed this to the existing gender gap in the employment in the public sector in Kenya which is predominantly dominated by the male gender. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents in the county were between ages 30-40 year bracket representing a 55.0 %; 28.3% were below 30 years of age; 11.7% were more than 60 years of age and 5% were between age bracket of 50-60 years of age. Thus the highest were 55% while the least were 5%. This meant that the sample used by the study was well distributed in terms of age and could therefore give reliable information. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents had a university degree 85.8% middle level college education 10.0% and 4.2% had attained secondary. This showed that most of the respondents were knowledgeable and gave valid, reliable and more accurate response in regard to research question. Majority of the respondents 56.7% had worked for the county government of Makueni for between 5-10 years. Ideally when combined, more than 85.2% had worked for the county for more than 5 years and only 14.8 % had worked with the county for less than 5 years. From the findings, the researcher concluded that majority of the respondents had enough experience with the Makueni county strategies and hence would provide valid and credible information with regard to employee voice and performance. And therefore it was established that work experience meant most of the respondents were aware of the county government operations, procedures, rules etc.

**Descriptive statistics**

**Descriptive Findings of Employee Voice**

The respondents rated five point likert scale questions on **Employee Voice** and the findings are indicated in Table 5.

*Table 5: Responses on Employee Voice*

Statements	N	5(%)	4(%)	3(%)	2(%)	1(%)	Mean	Std. Dev
county employees are consulted by management before making decision on issues touching on them	2(1.7)	4(3.3)	4(3.3)	2(1.7)	108(90.0)		1.25	.812
Employees are involved in decision making	2(1.7)	4(3.3)	4(3.3)	61(50.8)	49(40.8)		1.74	.815
Employees usually voice their issues in a conducive environment	4(3.3)	4(3.3)	4(3.3)	9(7.5)	99(82.5)		1.38	.953

Employees sit on several committees participate in key decision making	2(2.7)	10(.3)	0(0.0)	27(22.5)	81(67.5)	1.54	.978
Employee attitude surveys are carried out annually	8(6.7)	7(5.8)	2(1.7)	15(12.5)	86(72.5)	2.06	4.792
Suggestion boxes(schemes) are placed in central places for use by employees to contribute ideas for improvement	2(1.7)	3(2.5)	4(3.3)	8(6.7)	103(85.8)	1.28	.788
Regular meeting with its employees	8(6.7)	6(5.0)	2(1.7)	23(19.2)	81(67.5)	1.64	1.172
County government employees are members of workers union	75(62.5)	37(30.8)	0(0.0)	8(6.7)	0(0.0)	4.49	.810
Employees are routinely administered w with attitude surveys to identify and correct employee work performance problems	6(5.0)	3(2.5)	7(5.8)	19(15.8)	85(70.8)	1.55	1.060

According to study findings in Table 5; the respondents strongly disagreed that county government employees are consulted by management before making decision on issues touching on them as indicated by a mean of 1.25 and standard deviation of 0.812; they disagreed that employees are involved in decision making as indicated by a mean of 1.74 and standard deviation of 0.815. The respondents strongly disagreed that Employees usually voice their issues in a conducive environment as indicated by a mean of 1.38 and standard deviation of 0.953; they also disagreed that employees sit on several committees participate in key decision making as indicated by a mean of 1.54 and standard deviation of 0.978.

Consequently the respondents disagreed that Employee attitude surveys are carried out annually as indicated by a mean of 2.06 and standard deviation of 4.792; they also strongly disagreed that Suggestion boxes(schemes) are placed in central places for use by employees to contribute ideas for improvement as indicated by a mean of 1.28 and standard deviation of 0.788. The respondents strongly agreed that county government employees are members of trade union as indicated by a mean of 4.49 and standard deviation of 0.810; they disagreed that the county management holds regular meeting with its employees as indicated by a mean of 1.64 and standard deviation of 1.172; further they disagreed that Employees are routinely administered with attitude surveys to identify and correct employee work performance problems as indicated by a mean of 1.55 and standard deviation of 1.060.

From the study findings; 52.9% were of the opinion that top management support would improve employee performance, 31.0% were of the opinion that problem solving techniques and conflict resolution would improve employee participation and 16.1% responded that open communication between the management and employees would improve employee participation. Respondents also gave various methods that are used in the

county. Of this, 46.5% agreed that quality surveys or circles were in place at the county; 24.4% responded on decision working teams and 29.1% responded on suggestion boxes. Looking at figure 4.8, county employees are members of a workers union. This elicited a mean of 4.49 which was the highest meaning that most respondents were in agreement. They belonged to this union. This union is important to the workers as it voices their concerns and or grievances. The parameters used were between the scales of 5% strongly agreed and 1% strongly disagree. Overall, from the above measurements in Table 4.8, we can conclude that indicators used to operationalize the variables had an approximate average mean of 1.50. This meant that most respondents strongly disagreed.

**Descriptive Findings of Organization Performance**

The respondents rated five point Likert scale questions on Organization Performance and the findings are indicated in Table 6.

*Table 6: Responses on organizational Performance*

	5(%)	4(%)	3(%)	2(%)	1(%)	Mean	Std. Dev
Customer feedback reports indicates positive results of services	33(28.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	2(1.7)	83(70.3)	1.86	1.348
The employees in this County are satisfied with their day to day responsibilities and activities	32(27.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	4(3.4)	82(69.5)	1.85	1.331
The employees attitude towards work has improved	29(24.6)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	6(5.1)	83(70.3)	1.79	1.287
The quality of work provided by the employees in this county is exceptional	34(28.8)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	5(4.2)	79(66.9)	1.91	1.352
Employees in this County provide efficient services to their customers and the customers are very happy about this exemplary service	32(27.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	7(5.9)	79(66.9)	1.87	1.324
There is good number of projects delivered	32(27.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	86(72.9)	1.81	1.339

As depicted in Table 6; majority of respondents with a mean of 1.60 disagreed that Staff turnover has decreased in their county government due to efficient use of human resource practices that motivate, attract and retain them in the county this was indicated by a mean of 1.60 and standard deviation 1.234; 0% respondents were undecided on if Employees in the county were leaving their jobs to look for greener pastures elsewhere as indicated by a mean of 3.14 and standard deviation 1.346. A total of 83% of respondents disagreed that the customer feedback reports indicated positive results about the employee’s services this was indicated by a mean of 1.86 and standard deviation 1.348; while 82% of respondents disagreed that employees in the county were satisfied with their day to day responsibilities and activities this was indicated by a mean of 1.85 and standard deviation 1.331.

A total of 83% of the respondents disagreed that employee’s attitude towards work has improved this was indicated by a mean of 1.79 and standard deviation 1.287; A total of 79% disagreed that the quality of work provided by the employees in the county was exceptional this was indicated by a mean of 1.91 and standard deviation 1.352. In addition, a total of 79% respondents disagreed that employees in the county provide efficient services to their customers and the customers are very happy about this exemplary service as indicated by a mean of 1.87 and standard deviation 1.324; A total of 86% also disagreed that they are satisfied with their job position and the responsibilities that they perform in their county as shown by a mean of 1.81 and a standard 1.339. From the above measurements in Table 4.12, we can conclude that indicators used to operationalize the variables had an approximate average mean of 1.50. This meant that most respondents strongly disagreed.

Table 7: Influence of Employee Voice on Organization Performance

**ANOVA**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Regression	26.481	5	5.296	3.649	.004
Residual	158.217	109	1.452		
Total	184.698	114			

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>		<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>			
(Constant)	3.239	.886			3.657	.000
Employee voice	.826	.365	.433		2.265	.025

Dependent Variable: Organization Performance

Source: Field Data (2022)

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Voice
- b. Dependent Variable: Organization Performance

The ANOVA test is used to determine whether the model is important in predicting the organization Performance. At 0.05 level of significance the ANOVA test indicated that in this model the independent variable Employee Voice was predictors of organization performance as indicated by significance value=0.005 which is less than 0.05 level of significance ( $p=0.001<0.05$ ).

From the findings in table 4 above; at 5% level of significance, where Employee Voice was a significant predictor of organizations Performance at County Government of Makueni where ( $p=0.025<0.05$ ). A unit increase in Employee Voice will result to 0.826 increase in organizations performance,

### **Conclusion**

The study determined that strategic employee voice influence performance in County Government of Makueni. It can therefore be concluded that employees in county did not voice their issues and on matters concerning them in a conducive manner and that the environment was hostile to them. The management are encouraged to have a conducive environment free from abuse enabled employee's air their views or issues. The views aired by employees could be beneficial to improvement of the County Government. Employees who aired their views

especially displeasure views should not be victimized as some of the views emanate from frustration of work environment.

### **Recommendation**

The study recommends that employee voice mechanisms be put in place in order to steer employee performance. Employee voice in organizations impacted on quality and productivity of employees and inhibited issues that could explode. Employee participation allows workers to put some influence over their work and the conditions under which they worked.

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