



JOB AUTONOMY AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT OF ISIOLO, KENYA

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Abstract:

Employees are a company's strategic asset, and their efforts help the organization to sustain itself in an increasingly competitive world. Previous research has shown that high job autonomy will allow workers to take part in some activities, thereby increasing their willingness and motivation to learn and prepare further. This study therefore sought to examine the influence of job autonomy on employee performance in county government of Isiolo. This study adopted a descriptive research design involving a mixed method approach. Employees in county government of Isiolo formed the target population for this study. A sample of 140 employees was arrived at by stratified sampling. A structured self-administered questionnaire and interviews were used for the study. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis were employed with the help of SPSS. The study found that there was a high job autonomy among employees in county government of Isiolo. Findings also showed as a high employee performance in the sample. There was a significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 27.602$, $df = 16$, $p = 0.035$) between job autonomy and employee performance. The study concluded that job autonomy influences employee performance in county government of Isiolo. Human resource managers in the public sector ought to enhance job autonomy by increasing the control among employees have over what they are supposed to accomplish.

Keywords: job autonomy, employee performance, county governments

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1. Introduction

Employees are a company's strategic asset and their efforts help the organization to sustain itself in an increasingly competitive world (Kashan, Shah, Ali & Ali, 2015). The output of the employee can be defined as responses that reflect the employee's learning or type of training that has been given to the employee and that include the outcome of mental and psychological ability (Jamil, Ahmad & Nazir, 2016). Afshan, Sobia, Kamran and Nasir (2012) described the output as fulfilling specific tasks measured against default or speed standards. Employee performance can be manifested in improvement in output growth, efficient use of modern technologies and highly motivated workers.

The credibility of any public service is derived from the ability to respond economically effectively to the needs of its people. The tasks of public organizations are often more far-reaching and deeper-reaching than private-sector organizations in order to promote general social welfare as well as to protect society and every person within it (Lameck, 2017). Community agencies must draw people willing to work in the industry. Mboi (2014) notes that the demand for public sector goods and services has increased because of the increasing population in countries throughout the world, which, in turn, has challenged organizations in the public sector to improve performance. However, available literature suggests below average performance of public sector employees.

Gallup (2014) estimated that the federal workforce productivity was 11% lower than in the typical company organization due to lagging rates of employee engagement. Based on the average federal wage and federal workers estimates, the difference in productivity is added to the \$18.5 billion annually. In Pakistan's public sector, Kashan et al. (2015) showed weak results. In India, Suman (2018) reported that employee companies were affected or labor relations deteriorated. One cause of these companies' poor performance was indiscipline between employees. The staff of the Minister of Health Headquarters in Kampala, Uganda reported low performance in Basaza (2016). Kenyan Public employees have been met with multiple allegations, claims and alleged cases of corruption, poor service quality, delays in planned production outcomes, low cost-efficiency and more (Aluvisia, 2016).

Job autonomy can be characterized as a *“practice or collection of practices involving hierarchical delegation of responsibility, in order to provide employees with enhanced decision-making powers to carry out primary tasks”* (Shobe, 2018). Previous research has shown that workers can be highly autonomous in work, enthusiastic and free to participate in such activities and thus improve their ability and motivation to further grow and prepare (Zhou, Li and Gong, 2019). Saragih (2015) proposed the skillful and imaginative output of their work for workers with greater job autonomy. Lehmann (2016) suggests that, when an employee has a certain degree of work autonomy, he or she will decide on his or her balance of work and life that will contribute to improved job satisfaction and efficiency.

Isiolo County is one of the 47 counties in Kenya. It covers an area of 25,336.7 square kilometers, on the upper Eastern region of Kenya. Isiolo Town is the capital town of the county. The county is mainly semi-arid. The County has two constituencies, three sub-

counties and ten wards. It has approximately 40,000 households and an estimated population of 1.9 million people). Livestock production remains the biggest economic activity with approximately 80% of the population relying on it (County Government of Isiolo, 2020). The county has 1,300 employees. In 2018, all the accounting officers, including ministers, their chief officers and directors of departments signed performance contracts in a bid by the county to enhance employee performance (Abdi, 2018).

With the advent of devolution, Kenyan citizens expected improved service delivery. However, this has not been the case for majority of counties in Kenya, for example, Isiolo County emerged as one of the worst performing counties under the Kenya Devolution Support Programme (KDSP) in the 2017/2018 financial year (World Bank, 2019). In another survey, All Africa Advisors (2019) ranked Isiolo County 31st in service delivery. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) (2019), Isiolo County recorded a mere 4.7% gross county product (GCP) growth between 2014 and 2017. It can be noted that this performance is not only below the national average but also lower than the neighbouring counties such as Embu and Meru. This study therefore sought to examine the influence of job autonomy on employee performance in county government of Isiolo and thus addressed the following objectives: To evaluate the level of job autonomy among employees in county government of Isiolo, Kenya, to establish employee performance in county government of Isiolo, Kenya and to determine the association between job autonomy and employee performance in county government of Isiolo, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. SDT represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality (Krause, North & Davidson, 2019). It links personality, human motivation, and optimal functioning. It places that there are two primary kinds of inspiration—natural and outward—and that both are amazing powers in moulding what our identity is and how we act (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As a persuasive hypothesis, it tends to what stimulates individuals' conduct and moves them vigorously, just as how their conduct is controlled in the different spaces of their lives.

People can be proactive and drawn in or, on the other hand, inactive and estranged, generally as a component of the social conditions where they create and work (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT depicts the basic effect of the social and social setting in either encouraging or upsetting individuals' fundamental mental needs, saw feeling of self-bearing, execution, and prosperity (Leagult, 2017). SDT subtleties how the styles and techniques of inspirations, for example, guardians, instructors, mentors, chiefs, and medicinal services experts can advance or subvert commitment and the positive results that follow from it.

SDT recommends that individuals are inspired to develop and change by three intrinsic and all-inclusive mental need: skill, association, and self-sufficiency (Migliorini,

Cardinali & Rania, 2019). Fitness is the capacity to feel powerful in what one does. At the point when an individual feels equipped, they feel a feeling of dominance over their condition and feel positive about their abilities. Self-governance is the capacity to feel autonomous and ready to follow up on the world such that coordinates one's wants. In the event that the individual needs self-governance, the person feels constrained by powers that are not in accordance with what their identity is, regardless of whether those powers are interior or outside. Association or relatedness is the capacity to feel associated with others and a feeling of having a place. So as to have one's relatedness needs met, they should feel imperative to the others in their circle (Vinney, 2019).

Job autonomy is a key part of SDT. As indicated by the hypothesis, individuals have a need to feel that they are the experts of their own predetermination and that they have probably some commands over their lives; in particular, individuals have a need to feel that they are in charge of their own conduct (Krause, 2019). Independence is one of the basic components in building genuine representative commitment to create better worker execution. This theory aims to establish quality of work life factors influencing employee performance. Autonomy is the main variable in this study whereby the study seeks to determine the influence of job autonomy on employee performance in county government of Isiolo.

2.2 Empirical Review

Previous research has shown that high job autonomy will allow workers to take part in some activities, thereby increasing their willingness and motivation to learn and prepare further (Jong, 2016). Autonomy is a predictor of job satisfaction and is increasingly relevant at work. However, job freedom provides workers with the optimal conditions for making their jobs (Gillet *et al.*, 2013). Accessible studies show that workers who feel free to decide whether to do their job at work are happier and more successful.

Muecke and Iseke (2019) meta-logically analyzed an integrative structure that joins job autonomy to work execution. Results from a rundown of 319 investigations and 151,134 members demonstrate that, by and large, job autonomy prompted better occupation execution, for the most part by improving work inspiration yet additionally by diminishing mental strain. The creators separated three elements of job autonomy (dynamic, technique, and booking autonomy) and indicated that hypothetical components change contingent upon the kind of autonomy. Work inspiration was most firmly upgraded by dynamic autonomy, yet it was reduced by planning autonomy. The strain-lessening impacts were more grounded for dynamic autonomy and technique autonomy than for booking autonomy. Besides, primer proof shows that center self-assessments intervened the impacts of job autonomy measurements on work inspiration and mental strain.

An examination by Saragih (2015) inspected the connection among job autonomy and work results (work execution, work fulfillment and occupation stress), self-viability as an interceding variable. The auxiliary relationship demonstrated that job autonomy essentially identified with work fulfillment and execution, however not huge with work pressure. It additionally indicated that self-adequacy somewhat intervened the

connection among job autonomy and work fulfillment, and employment execution. Likewise, this exploration found that self-adequacy not intervened the connection among job autonomy and work pressure. There was no noteworthy connection among job autonomy and work execution however this examination indicated that activity fulfillment fundamentally identified with work execution.

Suteerawut, Vanno and Khaikleng (2016) investigated how job autonomy and positive mental capital assist associations with advancing representatives' exhibition through inborn work inspiration. The auxiliary relationship demonstrated that job autonomy, positive mental capital and inborn work inspiration altogether identified with work execution. What's more, results from the present investigation indicated that inherent work inspiration completely intercedes the connection among job autonomy and work execution, and in part intervenes connection between positive mental capital and employment execution.

An examination by Zhou, Li and Gong (2019) look at how and when job autonomy advances representative's self-improvement. The outcomes demonstrated that job autonomy anticipated representative's self-advancement, and worker's inborn inspiration completely interceded this relationship. Group availability emphatically directed the connection among job autonomy and characteristic inspiration, and further directed the intervention impact of inherent inspiration. Sisodia and Das (2013) appeared there is a huge contrast secured between position responsibilities of workers with high and low job autonomy. There is a critical contrast secured between position responsibility of representatives of high various leveled gathering and those of low progressive group and noteworthy communication impact found among job autonomy and progressive level upon authoritative duty of workers.

Utilizing basic condition displaying, Brink, Emerson and Yang (2016) assessed an example of experienced Chinese bookkeepers from an assortment of enterprises and locate an immediate, positive, and malicious impact among job autonomy and counterproductive practices. Be that as it may, this impact is made up for and turned around by a lot of backhanded and invaluable impacts applied through the impact of occupation fulfillment and saw authoritative help. Burcharth *et al.* (2017) analyzed how authoritative exercises that officially give representatives work autonomy clarify the presentation of open development (OI). According to the investigation, the financial advantages of both inbound and outbound OI are completely caught just if firms give representatives time, opportunity and freedom. The outcomes demonstrated that worker autonomy completely intervenes the connection among receptiveness and advancement deals, while the selection of inbound OI is decidedly connected with the presentation of new items.

Rizwan and Jamil (2014) study explored the enhancements of occupation stress, working conditions and autonomy of work on representative fulfilment. The aftereffects of the investigation approved that there is noteworthy positive connection among Autonomy of work and Employee Satisfaction. As per these results, Autonomy of work gives over 30% to Employee Satisfaction. Malinowska, Tokarz and Wardzichowska (2018) analysed the connection between autonomy of work, situational work inspiration,

work commitment, and workaholism. The outcomes affirmed that self-sufficient inspiration intercedes the connection among autonomy of work and work commitment. The suspicion about the intercession job of controlled inspiration in the connection among autonomy of work and work holism was anyway not affirmed.

Naqvi, Ishtiaq, Kanwal and Ali (2013) study assessed the impact of job autonomy on work fulfilment and authoritative duty with a directing job of hierarchical culture in the inexpensive food area of Pakistan. Results indicated that an expansion in job autonomy brings about an expanded degree of employment fulfilment and hierarchical responsibility and authoritative culture directs this relationship. Gözükaraa and Çolakoğlu (2016) study results showed that job autonomy positively affected occupation fulfilment, while work-family strife had a negative interceding impact on this connection among job autonomy and work fulfilment.

In Kenya, Wambui (2018) analysed the impact of autonomy on the exhibition of workers among private value firms in Nairobi City County in Kenya. In view of the outcomes, autonomy was found to influence worker execution essentially. Ngari, Muathe and Kilika (2018) autonomy was found to influence the presentation of workers, while task importance didn't essentially influence execution of representatives among Private Equity Firms in Nairobi City County in Kenya. Catherine (2018) concentrate in AAR human services Kenya ltd discovered that activity configuration influences worker commitment and that both are fundamentally related. Occupation configuration was found to contribute 67% of the fluctuation in the degree of commitment among the representatives. Autonomy was all the more unequivocally associated with representative connected when contrasted with the other assignment qualities.

The reviewed studies in this section demonstrate that job autonomy is significantly related to employee performance. Specifically, job autonomy has a strong positive correlation with performance. However, majority of these studies are conducted in private firms and empirical evidence from public sector especially counties is scarce. There is therefore a need to fill this gap by determining the influence of job autonomy on employee performance in county government of Isiolo.

3. Material and Methods

This study adopted a descriptive research design involving a mixed method approach. The term "mixed methods" refers to an emergent methodology of research that advances the systematic integration, or "mixing", of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation or sustained program of inquiry (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Employees in county government of Isiolo formed the target population for this study. There were 1,380 employees in the county government at the time of the study (County government of Isiolo, 2020). Stratified sampling was used for this study. In study, the population of employees was divided according to their departments. Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) recommend a sampling of 10%-30% in stratified sampling. The current study used a stratified sampling of 10% to arrive at a sample of 140 respondents as shown in Table 1. In addition to the 140 employees, 6 heads of departments were included in the

study. Simple random sampling was used to recruit respondents. This was achieved by dividing the sample to the various sub-departments. For example, in the water sanitation, energy, environment, natural resources and climate change where there is a sample of 24 respondents as shown in Table 1, the researcher randomly selected 4 employees from each of the 6 sub departments to make 24. This ensured that every sub department and department in the county government of Isiolo was represented in the study.

Table 1: Sampling Matrix

Department	Total number of Employees	Sample
Tourism, Trade, Cooperative & Enterprise Development	225	23
Finance, Economic Planning, Special Programs & ICT	254	25
Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries & Health Services	225	23
Water Sanitation, Energy, Environment, Natural Resources & Climate Change	236	24
Lands, Roads, Public Works, Urban Development & Physical Planning	235	24
Education, Youth and Sports and Social services	205	21
Total	1380	140

A structured self-administered questionnaire and interviews were used for the study. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the employees. The interview schedule was used to collect data from heads of departments. The interview schedule allowed the researcher to probe on the subject matter and to allow the interviewer to adapt to the interaction that unfolds. For this study, validity was established through piloting the research instrument. Valuable feedback on how to improve the instrument was done accordingly. Questions in the questionnaire were rephrased to make them more clear to the respondents and repeated questions were removed altogether. Pilot data was used to test reliability of the study. A pilot study was conducted in Meru County. Data collected was analysed to check for internal consistency using SPSS. A coefficient of 0.8 will be taken as a measure of high internal consistency and therefore reliability. A coefficient of 0.83 was achieved in this study rendering the instrument fit for data collection. The drop off pick up method was used to collect data using questionnaires. The researcher individually delivered the questionnaire to each employee who had consented to participate in the study. The employees were given 7 days to fill the questionnaire.

Data collected in the study was mainly quantitative. Descriptive statistics were therefore employed to analyse data. This comprised frequencies and percentages. Measures of central tendency such as mean and standard deviation were also used especially for Likert scale data. Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Job autonomy was therefore the independent variable while employee performance was the dependent variable. Job autonomy was measured on three items namely work scheduling, work method and decision-making while quality of service and achievement of performance targets were used to measure employee performance.

Chi-square tests were conducted to establish influence of quality of work life on employee performance in the devolved system of governance Analysis was conducted

with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. The results of analysis was presented in form of tables. Approval of the study was obtained from relevant bodies such as St Paul’s University, National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Permission to collect data was obtained from county government of Isiolo. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and willing persons were required to provide informed consent. The questionnaire did not bear any markers and respondents will not indicate their names to ensure anonymity. Study findings are strictly for academic purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 128 questionnaires were returned fully filled and fit for analysis. This represented a response rate of 91.4%.

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics assessed in the study included gender, age, education, profession and working experience of respondents. Results show that 55.5% (n=71) of the respondents were male whereas 44.5% (n=57) were female. The results indicate that 39.1% (n=50) of the respondents in the study were aged between 31 and 40 years while 24.2% (n=31) were aged between 21 and 30 years. The mean age was 33 years. Majority 69.5% (n=89) of the respondents had acquired a diploma. The results also show that 23.4% (n=30) had acquired a bachelor’s degree while 7% (n=9) had a post graduate degree. On working experience, results in 2 show that majority 62.5% (n=80) had accumulated working experience of over 5 years.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n=128)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	71	55.5
	Female	57	44.5
Age (Years)	21-30	31	24.2
	31-40	50	39.1
	41-50	28	21.9
	>51	19	14.8
Education	Diploma	89	69.5
	Bachelor's degree	30	23.4
	Postgraduate degree	9	7.0
Profession	Business	68	53.1
	Agriculture	30	23.4
	Health	9	7.0
	Teaching	15	11.7
	Others	6	4.7
Working Experience	<4	48	37.5
	>5	80	62.5

4.2 Employee Performance

The study sought to establish the performance of employees in county government of Isiolo. Results in Table 3 show that majority (82%) of the respondents agreed that employees provide a high quality of service to the public. Majority (74.2%) of the respondents also agreed that they used the service charter to provide services to customers. However, slightly above half (50.7%) of the respondents disagreed that there are minimal customer complaints in the count. Results show that majority (73.4%) of the respondents agreed that quality of work performance is always high. Slightly less than half (45.3%) agreed that supervisors regularly commended employees for an outstanding performance however, 39.9% disagreed. The vast majority (93.8%) agreed that employees always surpass work target. Majority (68%) (M=21.9, SD=1.264) of the respondents agreed with the statements in Table 3. This shows that there was a high employee performance in the county government of Isiolo.

Table 3: Employee Performance

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	M	SD
Employees provide a high quality of service to the public.	82%	7%	11.0%	1.77	1.081
I normally use the service charter to provide services to customers.	74.2%	9.4%	16.4%	1.91	1.298
There are minimal customer complaints in the county.	39.1%	10.2%	50.7%	3.11	1.497
The quality of work performance is always high.	73.4%	6.3%	20.3%	2.08	1.390
Supervisors regularly commended employees for an outstanding performance.	45.3%	14.8%	39.9%	2.88	1.535
Employees always surpass work target.	93.8%	2.3%	3.9%	1.36	0.781
Average	68.0%	8.3%	23.7%	2.19	1.264

4.3 Job Autonomy

The study also sought to establish the level of job autonomy from the perspective of employees in county government of Isiolo. These results would enable the study to achieve the objective of the study which aimed to examine the influence of job autonomy on employee performance in county government of Isiolo. Results in Table 4 show that majority (80.5%) agreed that employees are allowed to decide how to go about getting their job done. Majority (78.1%) agreed that employees are able to choose the procedures to do their job. Majority (76.6%) of the respondents agreed that employees are free to choose the methods to use in carrying out their work. Results also show that majority (63.3%) agreed that employees have control over the scheduling of their work.

Results in Table 4 also show that 66.4% agree that employees have some control over the sequencing of their work activities. Majority (67.2%) agree that employees can decide when to do particular work activities. Results show that 76.6% agreed that job allows employees to modify the normal way they are evaluated so that they can emphasize some aspects of my job and play down others. In addition, 64.8% agreed that

employees are able to modify what their job objectives are while 66.4% agreed that employees have some control over what they are supposed to accomplish.

Table 4: Job Autonomy among Respondents

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	M	SD
Employees are allowed to decide how to go about getting their job done.	80.5%	10.9%	8.6%	1.68	1.094
Employees are able to choose the procedures to do their job.	78.1%	8.6%	13.3%	1.93	1.211
Employees are free to choose the methods to use in carrying out their work	76.6%	10.2%	13.2%	2.01	1.090
Employees have control over the scheduling of their work.	63.3%	14.1%	22.6%	2.22	1.430
Employees have some control over the sequencing of their work activities	66.4%	10.9%	22.7%	2.17	1.329
Employees can decide when to do particular work activities.	67.2%	17.2%	15.6%	2.14	1.266
The job allows employees to modify the normal way they are evaluated so that they can emphasize some aspects of my job and play down others.	76.6%	10.2%	13.2%	2.08	1.120
Employees are able to modify what their job objectives are.	64.8%	13.3%	21.9%	2.27	1.450
Employees have some control over what they are supposed to accomplish.	66.4%	7%	26.6%	2.39	1.543
Average	71.1%	11.4%	17.5%	2.10	1.281

In the interview, the study also assessed the enforcement of job autonomy in the work place by asking the question; How does the county government ensure job autonomy of employees?. Some of the responses provided were:

“Employees’ opinions on work are sought and feedback is acted upon”

“Employees are invited to share their thoughts and feelings surrounding various work activities”

“Employees are asked what they think department goals should be”

“We discuss deadlines with employees on their deadlines”

“Autonomous self-regulation is supported where necessary”

Results in Table 4 show that on average, majority (71.1%) of the respondents were in agreement with items in the table. An average mean of 2.10 which indicates a high level of agreement to the items in the table and a convergence of views as indicated by a standard deviation of 1.281. These results therefore show that there was high job autonomy among employees in county government of Isiolo. This was supported by

findings from the interviews where respondents indicated that employees are free to choose the methods to use in carrying out their work and that employees can decide when to do particular work activities. This is in line with Muecke and Iseke (2019) findings that overall job autonomy resulted in higher work performance, primarily through increased motivation for working but also through reduction of mental stress. The autonomy of workers also has important consequences for employee satisfaction and work success in Saragih (2015). The autonomy of jobs, positive psychological capital and intrinsic motivation for work were specifically linked to job performance by Similarly, Suteerawut *et al.* (2016). Self-government substantially affected employee efficiency in Wambui (2018), Muathe and Kilika (2018) studies (2018). Brink *et al.* (2016) found that job autonomy and counter-productive actions had a strong, positive and deleterious effect.

4.4 Influence of Job Autonomy on Employee Performance

Results in Table 5 show that there was a significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 27.602$, $df=16$, $p=0.035$) between job autonomy and employee performance in county government of Isiolo. This finding is in agreement with findings of studies by Saragih (2015), Suteerawut *et al.* (2016), Wambui (2018), Muathe and Kilika (2018) and Muecke and Iseke (2019) who also found a significant relationship.

Table 5: Chi- Square output

	Chi-square (χ^2)	df	Significance (p)
Job autonomy	27.602	16	0.035***

*** Significant at 95% CI

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that job autonomy influence employee performance in county government of Isiolo. Specifically, increased job autonomy enhances employee performance. Results of the study showed that employees were allowed to decide how to go about getting their job done and were able to choose the procedures to do their job. Employees were also free to choose the methods to use in carrying out their work. This encouraged employees and enabled better employee performance. The implication of this study is showing that job autonomy is vital for employee performance in the county governments. The human resource manager at county government of Isiolo therefore can enhance job autonomy by increasing the control among employees on over what they are supposed to accomplish. This can be achieved by a more elaborate performance management system whereby realistic targets are set between the employees and the county government

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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