

The Influence of Staff Conflict Resolution on Employee Performance at Public Service Commission in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Staff conflict within organizations is a regular phenomenon in modern day. Employees are the life blood of the organization and thus staff conflict not resolved on time could be detrimental to organization performance. The objective of the study was to determine the effect of staff conflict resolution on employee performance at Public Service Commission in Kenya. The specific objectives were to assess the mediating role of employee participation on organization performance in the Public Service Commission in Kenya and to evaluate the impact of conflict resolutions on organization performance the Public Service Commission in Kenya. This research adopted descriptive survey research design and mixed mode research approach. The target population in this study comprised of the top, middle and low level managers in the Public Service Commission in Kenya. The study sample size of 141 respondents were selected. The study selected the respondents using stratified proportionate random sampling technique based on the management levels. Data was collected mainly by use of semi structured questionnaires. Path regression analysis was used to achieve the study objectives. The study found that conflict resolution positively and significantly affected employee performance. The study also found partial mediating effect of staff participation on the relationship between employee performances. This implied that staff conflict resolution impacts strongly and positively on performance of employees at public service commission. Staff conflict resolution will therefore be a milestone in employee performance. The study concluded that staff conflict resolution positively and significantly affect employee performance at public service commission. The important aspects of conflict resolution are participation of staff in conflict resolution and conflict resolution. Thus, conflict resolution is crucial in enhancing employee performance and hence organization performance. However, optimal results on conflict resolution cannot be achieved without employee participation. The study recommended that public service commission of Kenya should develop staff conflict resolutions mechanisms. Timely resolution of staff conflicts should be encouraged. Mechanisms of determining conflicts among the staff should be established. This will improve performance of the employees. The success of any organization is directly affected by the performance of the employees within the organization, whether or not those employees are dealing directly with customers.

Key Words: *Staff Conflict Resolution, Staff Participation, Conflict Resolution, Staff Performance, Public Service Commission in Kenya*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution has been of great concern to organizations following increased legalization of the workplace, particularly in the areas of occupational health and safety, discrimination, and harassment and heightened interest in the need for organizations to move to high performance work systems. Traditional workplace practices and systems with their hierarchical structures, tight divisions of labor, narrowly defined jobs, detailed rules, limit employee involvement, and

managerial decision making, authority, and control are no longer adequate since they foster conflict. Due to frequent organizational conflict, performance in most organizations has taken a comparatively nosedive sequence. The frequent agitation by workers for improved working conditions and other interests have led to a down toll which eventually affects organizations performance (Akoth, 2017). African countries such as Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia have experienced civil service changes witnessed in the recent past. This has resulted to significant improvement in the public sector service delivery (Okumbe, 2010). All the State Corporations in Kenya are expected to enhance not only the growth in the economy but also the development of all sectors. While the role of public sector in any economy like Kenya cannot be underrated, findings indicate that service delivery levels remains low due to among others, failure to timely resolve emerging staff conflicts. Further, conflict between the staff and organizations is a regular phenomenon in modern day and thus it's a key human resource practice. The economic review done by the G.O.K (2012) ascertained the decreased contributions of the public sector in Kenya to GDP growth besides creating wealth (Batt, 2012).

The main concern in Kenya has been on how to improve human resource productivity in public service. This led to formulation of public sector changes that were guided by Economic Recovery policy direction (RoK, 2011). Focus was towards recovering the economy and improving the public service delivery by the sector, transforming public processes and improving public service image. The need to ensure that performance of the public sector ran parallel to the national development goals, led to the spirited approach contained in the Vision 2030 framework. Human resource functions in the Kenyan Civil Service are vested with the Public Service Commission (PSC). As a central agency, it imperative that the commission has a commanding knowledge of the human resource strategy, execution plan and level of implementation for each ministry and State Department. The PSC is then required to match the human resource requirement of the government departments and ensure the employees attain optimal performance that are in line with national goals. There has been public outcry on the quality of services that civil servants offer, with the former being unsatisfied with the services offered by the latter (PSC, 2014). Often, it has been said that civil servants are not motivated, conflict not resolved and generally public servants are not productive (Mkalama, 2010).

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Running a human resource is a crucial organization function that seeks to maximize employee performance as per the set objectives. Efficient HRM practices are valued since they improve employee productivity (Cadalian, 2013). Conflict between the staff and organizations is a regular phenomenon in modern day. Employees are the life blood of the organization and thus staff conflict not resolved on time could be detrimental to organization performance. There is need to evaluate, review and redesign the human resource function so that there is clarity in its strategic intent and shaping it into a 'fit for purpose' organization. The increasing complex issues and rising demands for quality public service that the government confronts on a daily basis requires a new approach to managing human resources (Public Service Commission, 2014). Further, while there is consensus in literature on the importance of conflict resolution on employee performance, most organizations mainly in public sector lack mechanisms of detecting staff conflict and resolution of the same. Literature is also not comprehensive of whether staff conflict resolution improve staff performance mainly in public sector. It is against this backdrop that this study was conducted.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study was to determine effect of staff conflict resolution on employee performance at Public Service Commission in Kenya. The specific objectives were:

- i. To evaluate the influence of employee participation on organization performance in the Public Service Commission in Kenya,
- ii. To assess the mediating role of staff participation on the relationship between conflict resolutions and organization performance at the Public Service Commission in Kenya.

4. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

4.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory is a theory that explains the importance of social stability and change during the negotiation process among different parties (Gould-Wiliams & Davies, 2012). The theory holds that human relationships are based mainly on the subjective cost-benefit analysis and comparing the available alternatives. The theory details how individuals interact which mainly based by their self-interest on the cost and benefits of the interactions. Hence, the theory argues effective work place relationships will result in improved operational and organizational performance (Molm, 2010).

Particularly, the relationship between HRM practices and the employees' loyalty is mainly built on trust (Schuler, 2007). Trust is therefore termed as a critical factor in in avoiding conflict and managing conflict. The employees who feel more appreciated will perceive a better organization status and perform better and are less likely to be involved in conflict (Fuller *et al*, 2011). This is supported by the available empirical evidence whereby high employee involvements and securities will contribute to enhanced employee commitments and reduced conflict (Whitener 2010; Gallie *et al.*, 2010). The proposition of the theory is that enhancing the social interactions between the management and employees will lead to reduced conflicts and increased employee commitment and performance. The theory was used in assessing the impact of employee participation on conflict prevention and management at the Public Service Commission's performance in Kenya. The employee participation is theorized to make the employees feel appreciated and valued and thus reducing chances of conflict and contribute more towards the organization's prosperity (Sung Chuang, 2011).

4.2 Scientific Management Theory

Scientific Management Theory was introduced by Taylor's (1974). The theory holds that employee interactions and relations by the managements should be based on the assumptions that employees are not fully efficient in their operations. They are thus prone to conflicts and conflicts which may limit their performance and productivity. Employees should thus be treated both collectively and impersonally, with every employment concerns being transferred to management. These conditions lead to a suppressive management approach to employees concerns raising internal tensions within the organization (Mitchell, 2011).

The implication of the theory to this relationship is that clear aspiration to reduce staff conflict within the set organizational timelines and efforts to minimize internal tensions within the organization should be undertaken by setting rigid control mechanisms within the organizations to monitor and regulate activities in the different employees, workplaces. This theory was employed in the current study to evaluate the impact of conflict resolutions on organizational performance in the Public Service Commission of Kenya.

5. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

A study conducted by Robbin (2014) in conflict management in Europe established that collective bargaining could be an essential tool. This is whereby all the involved representatives are brought into the negotiation table so as to obtain an amicable agreement as pertaining to the problem at hand. Additionally, reconciliation was also determined to be helpful in the promotion of goodwill and creation of friendly approaches towards each other. This entails a circumstance in which conflicting groups who failed to reconcile earlier are brought together with the aim of settling their conflicts. The integrating style was studied by Goodwin (2012) in auditors' conflict management style. The study found that problem-solving approach that comprises cooperation among the factions with a win-win solution being attained represented a great concern for both self and related parties in the conflict. Bryant (2011) posited in support effective organizational management necessitates the incorporation of service providers notwithstanding their scale and influence variations. For those in possession of divergent cultures, or are subjugated by professional provisions of distinct professions, they are considered on the basis of conflicting paradigms.

A study by Kirkland (2011) explained that employee participation program exists in the full and total involvements as in such practices as management by objectives, quality circles, autonomous work groups and group decision making process, or partial involvements as in employee delegation, task force assignments and suggestion schemes. There has been debate among the scholars and management experts, more those scholars and expert from African, the Caribbean and the Asian continents on the effects of employee participation programs on employee performance. Majority of these scholars and management experts have been of the view that despite its success in the western countries and the grater American and some few selected countries in Asia more so Japan and Singapore, participation programs have recorded less success in Africa and the Caribbean. However, when applied haphazardly, employee motivation programs have been responsible for high levels of conflicts, complaints, sabotage and decreased efforts, output productivity and morale as supported by Ojukwe (2010).

Khumalo's (2013) study on management and organizational development revealed that total involvements and participation programs have been the best practices among big and established firms but hastily adds that its implementation and control remains a nightmare for the same organization. The study agreed that in those organization where the total participation programs has been in use, more positive developments associated with increased innovation, creativity, quality, commitments and positive identification with the organization have been realized. Akoth (2017) studied the influence of conflict management on organizational performance at Stima Sacco Society Limited. The study used descriptive research design. The findings of the study indicated that a majority (64.4%) of the respondents agreed that negotiation influenced organizational performance in Stima Sacco. In addition, the study revealed a positive relationship between negotiation and organizational performance ($r=0.438$); $pvalue (\leq 0.05)$

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study independent variable was conflict resolution while employee participation was the mediating variable. The dependent variable was employee performance. The conceptual framework is presented in figure 1.

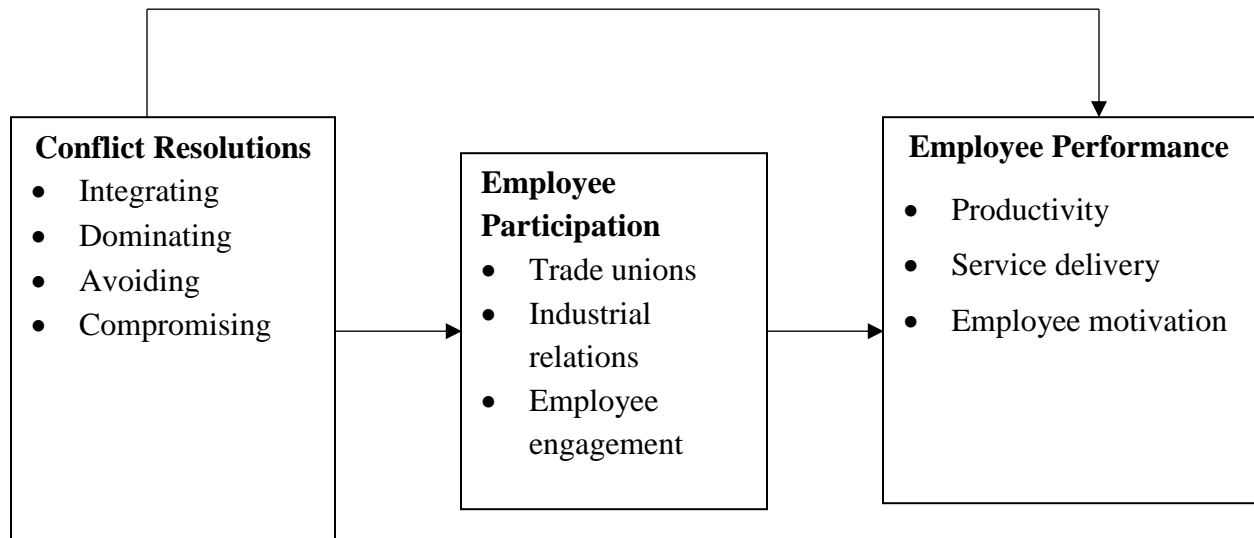


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised of the top, middle and low level managers in the Public Service Commission in Kenya. The study sampled a size of 141 respondents. The study selected the respondents using stratified proportionate random sampling technique. Data collected was collected by use of semi structured questionnaires. Initial descriptive analysis was performed using SPSS. Path regression analysis was used to test the study objectives. The first step involved regressing conflict resolution (independent variable) against organization performance (dependent variable). Step two involved regressing conflict resolution (independent variable) against employee participation (mediator). Step three involved regressing the employee participation to organization performance. Step four involved regressing organization performance (dependent variable) against conflict resolution (independent variable) and employee participation (mediator variable). Step one was meant to assess existence of the first order relationship while step four was meant to determine the level of mediation (partial or full mediation).

8. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Initial analysis involved regressing conflict resolution to organization performance. This was in line with the first objective which was to determine the effect of staff conflict resolution on employee performance at Public Service Commission in Kenya. Table 1 presents step one regression analysis results.

Table 1: Step One Regression Results

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
	.530a	0.28	0.275	0.90379		
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	42.023	1	42.023	51.445	.000a
	Residual	107.823	132	0.817		
	Total	149.845	133			
Coefficients						
		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	(Constant)	1.051	0.314		3.342	0.001
	Conflict resolutions	0.661	0.092	0.53	7.173	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict resolutions

b. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

The regression results indicate that conflict resolution has moderate significant positive influence on employee performance ($R=0.530$, $R^2=0.28$, $p<0.05$). This meant that employee performance and conflict resolution improves employee performance. Thus, an organization seeking to improve employee performance will need to invest in conflict resolution mechanisms. The mechanisms ought to be able to prevent conflict and resolve emerging conflicts on time.

Step two of regression analysis was done where employee participation was the independent variable and conflict resolution was dependent variable. This was crucial since mediation cannot occur if the intervening variable is not related to independent variable. The findings are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Step Two Regression Results

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.570a	0.325	0.32	0.74734		
ANOVA						
A		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	35.493	1	35.493	63.549	.000a
	Residual	73.724	132	0.559		
	Total	109.217	133			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Std. Error	Beta		

1	(Constant)	1.34	0.26		5.154	0.000
	Employee participation	0.608	0.076	0.57	7.972	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict resolutions

b. Dependent Variable: Conflict resolutions

The regression results indicate that employee participation has moderate significant positive influence on conflict resolution ($R=0.570$, $R^2=0.325$, $p<0.05$). This meant that employee participation affected conflict resolution and thus employee participation was crucial in resolving conflicts.

In step three, employee participation was regressed against employee performance and the results obtained presented in table 3.

Table 3: Step Three Regression Analysis Results

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.580a	0.336	0.331		0.64691	
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27.996	1	27.996	66.899	.000a
	Residual	55.241	132	0.418		
	Total	83.237	133			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.723	0.215		8.029	0.000
	Employee participation	0.506	0.062	0.58	8.179	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee participation

b. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

The regression results indicate that employee participation has moderate significant positive influence on employee performance ($R=0.580$, $R^2=0.336$, $p<0.05$). This meant that employee participation positively influenced employee performance.

The regression results in steps 1-3 indicated that there existed significant first order relationship between the conflict resolution, employee participation and employee performance. Thus, mediation was possible. In step four, conflict resolution, employee participation and employee performance was done. The findings are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Step Four Regression Analysis Results

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.668a	0.446	0.438		0.5933	
a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee participation, Conflict resolutions						
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	37.125	2	18.562	52.733	.000a
	Residual	46.112	131	0.352		
	Total	83.237	133			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.155	0.226		5.108	0.000
	Conflict resolutions	0.375	0.074	0.403	5.092	0.000
	Employee participation	0.306	0.069	0.35	4.424	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee participation, Conflict resolutions

b. Dependent Variable: Performance at Public Service Commission

The regression results indicate that jointly, conflict resolution and employee performance had moderate significant positive influence on employee performance ($R=0.668$, $R^2=0.446$, $p<0.05$). Conflict resolution and employee performance had significant Beta values. In Step 4, some form of mediation was expected to be present if the effect of conflict resolution on employee performance remained significant after introducing employee participation. Thus, employee participation has partial mediating effect on the relationship between conflict resolution and employee performance. The findings were in line with those of Akoth (2017) who found that negotiation influenced organizational performance.

9. CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to determine effect of staff conflict resolution on employee performance at Public Service Commission in Kenya. The specific objectives were: to assess the influence of employee participation on employee performance in the Public Service Commission in Kenya and to evaluate the impact of conflict resolutions on employee performance the Public Service Commission in Kenya.

The study concludes that staff conflict resolution positively and significantly affect employee performance at public service commission. Thus, conflict resolution is crucial in enhancing employee performance and hence organization performance. Employee participation is also concluded to have partial mediating effect on the relationship between conflict resolution and employee performance. Thus, success in conflict resolution measures may not be effected without staff involvement.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS


The study findings and reviewed literature indicate the importance of conflict resolution as a mechanism of promoting employee performance. The study therefore recommends that public service commission of Kenya should develop staff conflict resolutions and establish appropriate conflict resolution mechanisms. Timely resolution of staff conflicts should be encouraged. Mechanisms of determining conflicts among the staff should be established. This will improve performance of the employees. The success of any organization is directly affected by the performance of the employees within the organization, whether or not those employees are dealing directly with customers. Organizations that clearly understand the impact of their employees' performance are better able to manage employee output and productivity. Properly managing employee performance helps any business to increase profits and consistently meet their goals.

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