

## Quality Management Strategies and Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

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*Product or service quality has become the driving force of global firms. Customers have becoming more enlightened with products and services that they consume due to access of information. However, it is observed from literature that the concept of quality has continued to evolve due to different attitudinal and perceptual nature of customers. Issues of quality among public organizations and more especially public hospitals in Kenya have continued to raise mixed reactions from different stakeholders such as the members of the public, public benefit organizations and management of County Governments in general. For public hospitals in Kenya to meet the changing needs and wants of their customers, they need to adopt effective quality management strategies in order to surpass customer expectations. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of quality management strategies on customer satisfaction among public hospitals in Embu County, Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were; to establish the influence of employee training, research and development and employee motivation on customer satisfaction in public hospitals in Embu County, Kenya. The study was informed by the Total Quality Management Theory and supported by the SERVQUAL model and the Open System Theory. The study employed the descriptive research design to investigate the problem that was under study. Target population comprised of 239 respondents. The respondents of the study constituted employees of the six level four public hospitals in Embu County which included Siakago, Runyenjes, Kiritiri, Kianjokoma, Ishiara and Kairuri. Respondents were stratified into four strata and simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from each strata. The units of analysis were level four public hospitals and unit of observation were employees of public hospitals in Embu County. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires. Secondary data was obtained from internal management health reports, related articles and minutes of the organization. Validity of the instrument was tested using lecturers and quality management experts working in public hospitals in Kenya and reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha formula. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as regression analysis. Regression analysis was carried out at 95% confidence level and 5% significance level to establish the statistical relationship between variables of the study. The analyzed data was tabulated and presented in the form of means, standard deviation and percentages. The study established that there was a positive statistical relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable because all the independent variables significance values were less than the critical value 0.05. The study concludes that employee training, research and development and employee motivation are key determinants of customer satisfaction in public hospitals in Kenya. The study recommends that unless public hospitals in Kenya recognize the aspect of employee motivation, research and development and employee training, achieving organizational goals will be a difficult task to achieve in the dynamic business environment.*

**Key Words:** *Quality Management Strategies, Customer Satisfaction, Public Hospitals in Embu County, Kenya*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of quality has been experiencing controversies from various scholars around the world due to changes in consumer behaviors and theories from other disciplines (Singh & Mohanty, 2012). Quality is perceived from different perspectives by individual consumers. With increased industry competition, changing consumer needs, globalization, influence of technology, increased operational costs and convergence of markets, both profit and non-profit oriented organizations are striving to adopt quality management practices as specified by International Standards Organization (ISO) in order to remain competitive in the dynamic business environment (Abdullah, Uli & Tar, 2009). Customer satisfaction is viewed as a construct that is dependent on quality management strategies that seek to enhance the effectiveness of service delivery (Muzaffar, Salamat & Ali, 2012). Despite the fact that many organizations around the world are striving to adopt numerous quality management strategies to manage customer satisfaction, it is noted that customer satisfaction has remained to be an evolving concept due to different consumer psychological aspects such as attitude, perceptions and motives towards products and services (Khan, Khan & Khan, 2011).

Khanfar (2011) argues that customer satisfaction can be evaluated from different dimensions which include; marketing cost per customer, number of referrals, quantity of products purchased and customer life time value (Lambert & Ouedraogo, 2008). Improving quality management practices such as leadership, technology in service delivery, continuous improvement and conducting consumer surveys not only promotes organizational competitiveness but also enhances customer relations over the long term period (Lagrosen, 2002). Chen (2011) posits that the implementation of quality management strategies in the system can result to internal efficiencies, which is considered to be a perspective of global market competitiveness. Similarly, Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (2011) postulates that customer attraction and retention in the changing business environment will be determined by the quality management models applied. The foundation of quality management strategies is established on the premise of customer centric culture (Eristavi, 2012). Zaim, Turkyilmaz, Tarim, Ucar and Akkas (2010) affirm that consistency in service and satisfaction is based on the quality management strategies adopted by an organization and always seek to identify intrinsic factors that drive customers to seek distinct services (Abdullah, Uli & Tar, 2009).

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Issues of service quality have been a concern for patients who are the immediate customers of public hospitals in Kenya. Frequent strikes among employees in public hospitals, aspects of technology and capacity development are issues which are attributed to inconsistencies in service delivery in public hospitals and have thus formed the basis of this study to establish the effect of quality management strategies on customer satisfaction. According to KIPPRA (2014), management of quality is a dominant factor of success in all private and public organizations. Many organizations in private and public sectors strive to adopt quality management strategies in order to satisfy their customers in the local and international markets. However, despite the fact that quality management strategies are intended to satisfy or exceed the interests of various stakeholders, it is noted that issues of customer dissatisfaction are evident in majority (81%) of public organizations and especially in public hospitals in Kenya (KIPPRA, 2014).

It is noted from limited studies which have been conducted locally and internationally that issues of customer satisfaction have not been fully addressed in the healthcare sector among developing countries of the world (Uwalomwa & Olamide, 2012). For instance, a study by Yusuf (2013) established that 68% of the customers who sought public services were unsatisfied due to lack of appropriate quality management strategies. Majority of the organizations were serving customers without proper mechanisms to measure customer satisfaction levels. However, it was noted that the study was confined to quality management and performance of manufacturing firms in Kenya but failed to address issues in the public health sector. Mueni (2014) revealed that quality management strategies such as employee training and technology were attributed to customer satisfaction. Further, the study noted that service gaps were common in public organizations as compared to private organizations thus service gaps. The study pointed out that an organization is likely to experience customer loyalty, efficiency, increased revenue, and market share and employee motivation by adopting quality management strategies. Nevertheless, it was noted that the study was limited to quality management in higher institutions in Kenya and focused on different variables such as customer policies and organization performance.

A survey by the Ministry of Health (2014) revealed that public hospitals in Kenya have continued to experience a number of problems ranging from service gaps, employee strikes, non-compliance to public health policies and high staff turnovers. In addition, a survey by World Health organization (2014) indicated that majority (63%) of the public health organizations in Kenya have not put appropriate mechanisms of managing customer complaints. Even though the findings revealed that quality management strategies were not implemented as required to reflect customer satisfaction, it was noted that little studies have been done to establish reasons behind the failure of implementing quality management strategies. A survey conducted by ISO (2014) on quality of services in public institutions in Kenya established that 78% of public institutions in Kenya experienced technological, leadership and change implementation problems when trying to adopt quality management strategies to manage customer satisfaction levels. The study further established that public hospitals in Kenya did not focus on implementing ISO practices due to internal challenges like culture and leadership styles. However, it was noted that the survey was limited to a single variable of service quality and ignored quality management strategies addressed by this study. However, from the findings of previously done studies, it is identified that minimal focus has been made by previous researchers with regard to quality management strategies and customer satisfaction in the public health sector. Therefore, it is on this background that this study sought to establish the influence of quality management strategies on customer satisfaction in public hospitals in Embu County, Kenya.

### **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of the study is to establish quality management strategies on customer satisfaction in Public Hospitals in Embu County.

The research specific objectives were:

- i. To establish the influence of employee training on customer satisfaction in Public Hospitals in Embu County.
- ii. To determine the influence of research and development on customer satisfaction in Public Hospitals in Embu County.

- iii. To establish the influence of employee motivation on customer satisfaction in Public Hospitals in Embu County.

#### **4. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

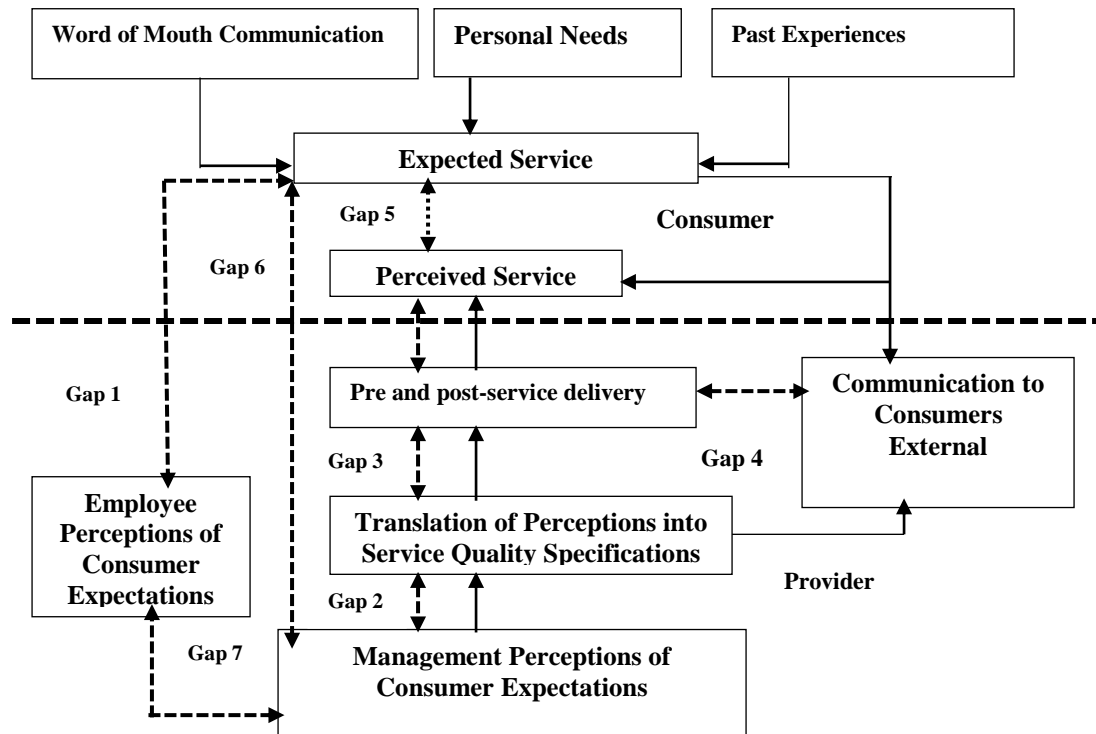
The study was anchored on the Total Quality Management Theory as the key theory and supported by SERVQUAL model and the Open System Theory as discussed.

##### **4.1 Total Quality Management Theory**

The theory was postulated by Edwards Deming and Joseph Juran in 1931. The theory was established on the foundation of customer satisfaction. They propose that quality is perceived from different perspectives by different customers. The central tenets of the theory emphasize that customer satisfaction in any competitive organization is determined by the kind of leadership, participation of workers in key decision making, integration of technology in the system, continuous improvement and consumer research (Yusuf, 2013). Alves and Raposo (2010) acknowledge that product design and business process reengineering can stimulate organization performance in terms of customer satisfaction. Surpassing customer expectation is one of the reasons organizations are able attract and retain customers (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Battisti, Nicolini and Salini (2010) affirm that customers are the sole stakeholders who can determine the quality of service of any system. Further, Hanif, Hafeez and Riaz (2010) posit that despite complexity of the customer satisfaction construct in the organizational context, organizations that want to achieve competitiveness have no option but to adopt quality management strategies to sustain themselves in the changing business environment (Zaim et al, 2010). Uwalomwa and Olamide (2012) contend that due to the changing customer service perspectives, organizations operating in the changing business environment can adopt multiple models of managing customer satisfaction (Sultan & Wong, 2010). The theory is anchored on this study based on the premise that public hospitals are likely to exceed customer satisfaction if they embrace strategic management practices such as strategic leadership, technology, consumer research and continuous improvement.

##### **4.2 SERVQUAL Model**

The SERVQUAL model was designed by Parasuraman, Valerie, Zeithaml and Berry in (1985) and was envisioned to be used for analysing the source of quality problems and for assisting organizational leaders understand how the concept of quality service can be enhanced. The model shows how service quality arises and includes the phenomena related to the customer and the service provider. The expected service is a function of the customers' past experiences and personal needs and word-of-mouth communication. It is also determined by the market communication activities of the firm. This basic structure of the model shows the steps that have to be taken into consideration when analysing service quality as shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure: 1: SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman, Valerie, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985)**

Further, the quality gaps shown are as a result of inconsistencies in the quality management process which leads to the ultimate between expected and perceived (experienced) service, which is a function of the other gaps that may have occurred in the process (Kotler, 2007). The model shows seven gaps. The expectations of customers and the perception of the management of these expectations can translate into quality specifications. These specifications and the service delivery at the forefront, what is promised in external communication, the actual service delivered and perceived performance and expectations which is a function of gaps as shown in the model. Battisti, Nicolini and Salini (2010) argue that the concept of the service gap informs most of the work which has been carried out to measure the satisfaction of quality delivery against the expectations of the consumers. In trying to find out where such gaps exist, one cannot assess the overall level of customer satisfaction only but should also reveal areas where improvements should be made to enhance the customer satisfaction levels.

### 4.3 Open System Theory

The Open system theory was first developed by Bertalanffy (1956). The theory argues that organizations are systems that collect information from the business environment and formulate decisions based on the data collected (Singh, 2012). Due to dynamism of the external environment, organizations should adopt multiple models such as the SWOT model and PESTEL 5Cs to analyze aspects that influence business operations (Senthikumar & Arulraj, 2010). Alves and Raposo (2010) opine that organizations that do not interact with the business environment are more likely to fail compared to firms that rely on the feedback they gather from the business environment. Khan et al (2011) argue that Total Quality Management being an externally oriented management philosophy in the modern context helps firms to circumnavigate through the ever-changing environment in order to be efficient and effective in the long run. The theory argues that organizations should align their TQM strategies with the changing needs of

customers for them to remain relevant in the ever changing business environment. Internal and external factors should be analyzed when formulating TQM policies (Singh, 2012). Further, Hanif *et al.* (2010) postulates that for effective implementation of quality management strategies in any organization, it is appropriate for managers to critically examine the effectiveness of the structures, processes, employees, culture and systems. For survival in the turbulent business environment, organizations have no alternative but to embrace practices that promote open door culture of information exchange between relevant stakeholders such as shareholders, employees and customers (Singh, 2012).

## 5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

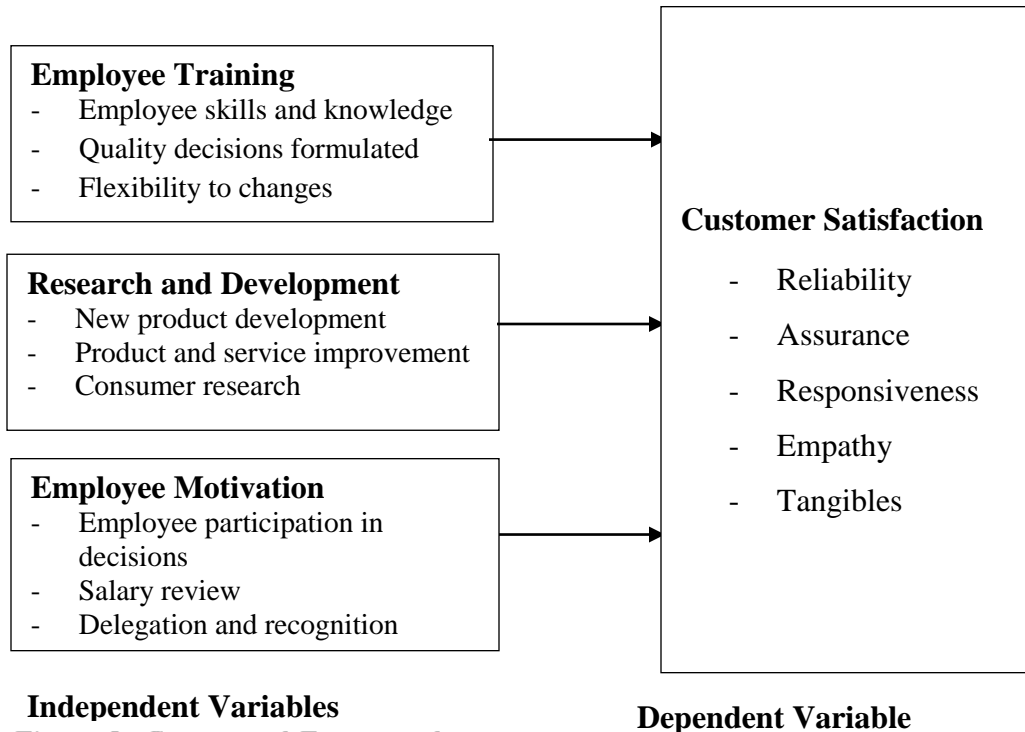


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

It is depicted from the conceptual framework in Figure 2 that quality management strategies that influences customer satisfaction are employee training, research and development and employee motivation. Indicators of employee training which influence customer satisfaction involve the employee skills and knowledge, quality decisions and flexibility to changes. Further, indicators of research and development involve new product development, improvement and consumer research and employee motivation indicators are employee participation in decision making, salary review, delegation and recognition. Moreover, indicators of the dependent variable which is customer satisfaction includes reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy and tangibles.

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to establish quality management strategies on customer satisfaction in public hospitals in Embu County, Kenya. The descriptive research design was suitable to this study because it allowed the researcher to test the relationship between variables in their natural setting without manipulating them. The target population of the study was 239 who comprised of employees of level four public hospitals in Embu which included Siakago, Runyenjes, Kiritiri, Kianjokoma, Ishiara and Kairuri. Out of the total

population of 239 respondents selected from level four public hospitals in Embu which included Siakago, Runyenjes, Kiritiri, Kianjokoma, Ishiara and Kairuri, random sampling technique was used to select the respondents of the study.

Further, the study adopted the stratified sampling technique where the total population was divided into strata and simple random technique was used to select the respondents from each stratum which displayed homogenous characteristics. To arrive at that ideal sample size, the study adopted the formula proposed by Israel (2009) in the form of  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ , where n represents sample size, N represents population size, e represents confidence level (0.05). Using N=239 in the formula, the resulting sample size (n) was 149 employees working in level four public hospitals in Embu County which included Siakago, Runyenjes, Kiritiri, Kianjokoma, Ishiara and Kairuri. Structured questionnaires were used as the main instrument in collecting the primary data. The respondents of the study from which information was sought constituted of employees of public hospitals in Embu County. Before data analysis, data collected was cleaned, edited and categorized for consistency of results. Statistical Package of Social Sciences version 21 was used to analyze data. Descriptive, correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze data in form of mean scores, standard deviation, percentages and frequencies. Regression analysis was also conducted at 95% confidence level and 5% significance level to determine the statistical relationship between variables. The regression model adopted was of the form;  $CS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ET + \beta_2 RD + \beta_3 EM + \varepsilon$ , where; CS denotes customer satisfaction,  $\beta_0$  denotes Y intercept,  $\beta_1$  to  $\beta_3$  denote regression coefficients, ET denotes employee training, RD denotes research and development, EM denotes employee motivation and  $\varepsilon$  denotes error term.

## 7. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Pearson's product moment correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between the variables while multiple regression was used to determine the predictive power of quality management strategies on customer satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1: Correlations Analysis**

	Employee Training	Research and Development	Employee Motivation
	1		
<b>Employee Training</b>	.710		
	.0012	1	
<b>Research and Development</b>	.693	.027	
	.0017	.799	1
<b>Employee Motivation</b>	.579	.560	.762
	.0023	.000	.560

The data presented on employee training, research and development and employee motivation was computed into single variables per factor by obtaining the averages of each factor. Pearson's correlation analysis was then conducted at 95% level of confidence interval and 5% significance level 2-tailed. Table 1 shows the correlation matrix between the factors (employee training, research and development and employee motivation) on Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County. It was established that a positive relationship between Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County and employee training, research and development and employee motivation with 0.710, 0.799 and 0.762 scores respectively existed. The positive relationship shows that there is a correlation between employee training, research and development and employee motivation and Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County. This notwithstanding, all the factors had a significant p-value ( $p < 0.05$ ) at 95% confidence level. The significance values for the relationship between Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County and employee training, research and development and employee motivation were 0.0012, 0.0017 and 0.0023 respectively.

**Table: 2 Cross Tabulations**

Item	Pearson Chi-square value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
<b>Employee Training</b>	17.846	15	.00
<b>Research and Development</b>	21.945	18	.03
<b>Employee Motivation</b>	19.945	18	.02

The study sought to establish the statistical relationship between the three variables of the study on the dependent variable. Simple-cross tabulation was conducted as shown in Table (4.10) above and significance values of the three variables were less than 0.05. From the findings, it was concluded that all the three variables (employee training, research and development and employee motivation) had a significant statistical influence on Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County. In addition, the researcher conducted a multiple regression analysis so as to test relationship among variables. The researcher applied the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS V 21) to code, enter and compute the measurements of the multiple regressions for the study. Coefficient of determination explains the extent to which changes in the dependent variable can be explained by changes in the independent variables or the percentage of variation in the dependent variable (Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County) that is explained by all the three independent variables (employee training, research and development and employee motivation).

**Table 3: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.923	0.852	0.789	0.6273

The three independent factors that were studied, explain only 85.2% of Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County as represented by the  $R^2$ . This therefore means that other factors not studied in this research contribute to 14.8% of Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County. Therefore, further research should be conducted to investigate



other factors (14.8%) that influence Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County.

**Table 4: Regression Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.139	1.2235		1.515	0.0133
Employee Training	0.887	0.1032	0.152	4.223	0.0122
Research and Development	0.752	0.3425	0.154	3.424	0.0112
Employee Motivation	0.645	0.2178	0.116	3.236	0.0111

The three variables of the study (Employee Training, Research and Development, and Employee Motivation) were regressed on the dependent variable (customer satisfaction). As shown in Table 4, after conducting regression analysis, it was established that the three independent variables of the study had a positive effect on the dependent variable, which meant that a unit increase in the independent variable would result to a unit increase in the dependent variable. According to the SPSS generated table above, the equation  $CS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ET + \beta_2 RD + \beta_3 EM + \epsilon$ , becomes:  $CS = 1.139 + 0.887ET + 0.752RD + 0.645EM$ . According to the regression equation established, taking all factors into account (employee training, research and development and employee motivation) constant at zero, sustainable customer satisfaction will be 0.139. The data findings analyzed also shows that taking all other independent variables at zero, a unit increase in employee training will lead to a 0.887 increase in Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County; a unit increase in research and development will lead to a 0.752 increase in Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County and a unit increase in employee motivation will lead to a 0.645 increase in Customer Satisfaction among Public Hospitals in Embu County. At 5% level of significance and 95% level of confidence, employee training showed a 0.0122 level of significance, research and development showed a 0.0112 level of significance and employee motivation showed a 0.0111 level of significance. Therefore, it was concluded that there is a positive relationship between independent variables (employee training, research and development and employee motivation) and dependent variable (customer satisfaction) among Public Hospitals in Embu County).

## 8. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that public hospitals in Kenya should embrace quality management strategies such as employee training to enhance creativity and innovation in the healthcare industry in Kenya. Through employee training, new skills are likely to be developed to address service gaps in the public health sector in Kenya. Further, investments

in research and development initiatives such as buying new medical equipment and training workers on ICT skills can boost the service experience in the healthcare sector in Kenya. Through exchange programs, medical officers are likely to gain in-depth understanding of complex and life threatening issues. However, counties should expand their budgets to promote research and development initiatives among public hospitals. Public hospitals in Kenya should embrace the culture of employee satisfaction to enhance quality of service delivery. Public hospitals should strive and benchmark its compensation policies with those of private hospitals to boost the morale of doctors, nurses and clinical officers. Public hospitals should embrace the culture of delegating duties, promote workers, train and enrich jobs of the medical officers. Public hospitals should craft a compensation policy that addresses issues of risk exposure among healthcare professionals.

## 9. RECOMMENDATION

The study established that despite the trainings attended by employees of public hospitals, service gaps were evident. Hence, this study recommends that public hospitals should carry out needs assessment among their workers periodically and subject them to formal training on customer care management to sustain the competitiveness of the healthcare sector in Kenya based on excellent customer care services. Public hospitals should partner with other industry players in order to adopt customer service models that are relevant with changing consumer needs and wants. Furthermore, the study identified that research and development initiatives were not fully endorsed by public hospitals due to the challenge of funds. Therefore, this study recommends that public hospitals in Kenya need to consider investing in modern medical equipment in order to provide improved customer services. In addition, public hospitals should partner with ICT firms in order to equip employees with ICT skills and invest in customer management systems. Through the Ministry of Health, public hospitals in Kenya should be integrated with modern ICT systems to facilitate service delivery in a more effective manner. The study established that motivation of workers in public hospitals was not given the attention it deserved and this had resulted to endless strikes. Therefore, the study recommends that National and County Governments should seek to establish a criterion of compensating medical staff based on their skills, knowledge and experience. Further, County Governments should develop comprehensive policies that encourage staff development rather than policies that focus on career stagnation. County Governments further should strive to expand healthcare budgets to address issues of housing, transport and medical covers among workers.

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