Effect of staff competence on performance of county governments in the central region, Kenya

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Abstract: **Most organization's aim is to realize and uphold great performance. In order to achieve superior performance, organizations have enhanced strategy implementation process and concentrated efforts on strategy implementation imperatives. County governments in Kenya have fallen below expected performance due to challenges like high personnel emoluments, under-performance in own source revenue collection, low absorption of development allocation, high levels of pending bills, and weak budgetary controls. Staff competence is a strategy implementation imperative that could help in resolving these challenges and therefore this study sought to establish the effect of staff competence in addressing the county government performance. Descriptive and explanatory research design were adopted. Structured electronic questionnaire was sent to 252 respondents in the five counties in central region of Kenya. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis and overall model tested at 95 % confidence level. Results showed that staff competence had positive significant effect on the county government performance in the central region with a beta coefficient of 0.211 and a p value <0.001.This study contributes to knowledge by providing a conceptual framework for the relationship between staff competence and county government performance, it makes contribution to policy by showing areas to emphasize on for improved performance of the county governments and also, on areas management should enhance in their plans and daily activities that will enable staff to do better for improved performance.**

Keywords: **Strategy Implementation, County Government Performance, Staff Competence.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, private, and public organizations have constantly been challenged by different environmental forces, various business complexities, technological advancement, globalization, climate change, and shifting customer preferences that push them to relook at how they do business. Obtaining efficiency, productiveness and sustaining performance goals therefore has become a key concern to these organizations (Basalamah, 2017). Governments all over the globe are increasingly under pressure from their residents to show performance results from the resources collected in taxes, and to be accountable for the promises made in their political manifestos, development plans, electoral pledges, and commitments. In addition, citizens demand for transparency on the impact of government's interventions in improving its citizenry quality of life. Paradoxically, the government's resource basket has not expanded in sequence with these demands which implies pressure to do more with less. In an era marked with rising demand to governments to provide quality services and flat revenues, it is critical to ensure optimal performance. Improved performance helps government to

be excellent in provision of quality services to its citizens efficiently and effectively (Hrebiniak, 2016). From running local health departments to overseeing compliance with regulations, counties deliver a variety of services.

According to Malina and Selto (2004), both non fiscal and monetary measures are used by many large organizations as a quantifier for their performance. Measuring organizational performance is important as it validates a process point of view that focuses on internal processes that measure how successful and coherent an action is with the set metrics. Accordingly, the performance of an organization is determined based on output and outcome, internal procedures and processes, profitability, organizational structure, employee's attitude, and receptiveness of an organization to the surroundings. According to Mutua (2009), Organizational performance incorporates actual output or organizational outcome which is determined in relation to already set goals and objectives. According to Levenson, Van der Stede and Cohen (2016) measures used within and techniques of its implementation for instance, the company's key performance indicators (KPIs), affects the association between implementation and performance. Therefore, the system for internal measurement applied will affect performance at both individuals and organization's levels.

County Governments in Kenya have had their share of these challenges especially because devolution is a relatively new notion in the country. According to World Bank Group (2016), devolved governments face challenges in instigating County integrated development plans which in turn affect performance. There is need therefore to create harmony in strategic management of public resources and betterment of the lives of citizens through repackaging performance management. Staff competence ensures enhancement of laid down processes and improves administration of existing resources thereby giving citizens a chance to see the outcomes of government effort which in turn gives them trust in County officials (Pangewa, 2015).

The Kenyan government is facing challenges in its transitional procedure of realizing County integrated development plans (CIDP), which is a major strategy for accomplishing national development objectives, leading to unaccomplished goals which translates to poor performance. (Hantiro & Maina, 2020). The study by Hantiro and Maina noted that implementation of CIDP has not been ultimately accomplished in most County Governments due to management and resource challenges passed on to the counties from the former local authorities, which are now part of the County Governments. According to Finch and Omolo (2015), the devolution process raised so much hope and high believes of how fast the development of the devolved government in Kenya will bring light to lives of ordinary citizens, better service delivery, suppress corruption and improve performance. Nonetheless, the County Governments in Kenya appear to have underperformed and have not lived up to the expectations of the citizens (Mbaka & Mugambi, 2018). It has also become challenging to fulfil performance expectation of the residents for better service delivery and thus the County Government heads and officers need to put their best foot forward to fulfil citizens' desires.

County Governments performance including those in central region anchored on County integrated development plans (CIDP) that were initially developed in 2013, which is the growth plan for five years. This plan clarifies on ways the County Government intends to use its assets in conveying development and facilities to inhabitants of the County; nevertheless, according to The World Bank Group 2016, the counties face challenges in instigating CIDP which in turn affect performance. Kenyan Government presently necessitates the ability to survive and thrive the economic settings they face, and this capability depends on how County Governments take suitable verdicts and implements them.

Problem Statement

Every organization's aim is to realize and uphold great performance which leads to progression and growth for the organization. There has been grumbles about poor service delivery by the devolved units from its citizenry even though formulation of strategic plans upon which performance contracting was based in the devolved systems of governance in Kenya was incorporated since 2013. Counties have fallen way below their revenue collection targets, projects are incomplete while pending bills have continued to accumulate, high personnel emoluments, roads are poorly maintained, no markets for traders, poor or lack of street lighting, irregular garbage collection, rampant corruption and non-payment or delayed payments to contractors and service providers leading to overall poor performance.

Despite counties having County integrated development plans, they face challenges in instigating them which in turn affect performance. Like any other establishments, County Governments have challenges in implementation of strategies. Some of the key challenges include;- organizational culture in which corruption has been rampant leading to failure to meet revenue collection targets; organizational structure that has not supported cost management, performance

improvement and effective and efficient service delivery; management that does not commit to strategic direction, strategic objectives and direction of communication with the aim to achieve County goals; staff competency to ensure compliance with due processes and regulations; and resource accessibility to meet the budgetary requirements for better performance among others which have an influence on organizational performance (Kloot & Martin, 2017).

This is in spite of the reality that County Governments obligate themselves to offering these services in their plans. This scenario was the researcher's motivation to want to investigate the effect of staff competence on County Governments' performance in the Central Region of Kenya as the general objective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

According to Popper (1963), a theory can be defined as statements that are created to make clarifications on certain evidence especially those with recurrent verifications or that are broadly believed and could be applied in making extrapolations regarding natural phenomenon or occurrence that is not well understood.

Higgins 8-S Strategy Implementation Framework

This framework was developed by Higgins (2005) after his review of McKinsey's 7-S framework, the focus of this framework is the execution of administration strategies. The development of 7-S strategy implementation framework was done back in the 80s by Peters and Waterman, (1982). Their study that focused on "best run" firms in America, Peters and Waterman established that there are 7 entwined techniques that should be the main focus of managers during implementation of strategies in organizations. After his review of McKinsey's 7-S model, Higgins (2005) added another S (Strategic performance) forming 8-S which is derived from the interaction of the 7-S from McKinsey's 7-S's model. Higgins noted it is challenging for a company to effectively implement strategies without having to organize other assets like time, money, technology, and information, one "S" for skills was replaced by Re-Sources. According to Higgins, managers' competent and effective performance is enabled by the 8-S's framework which allows them to handle obligations across various functions and other undertakings that are linked with implementation of strategies. One perception of the model is that administrators who recognize that implementation of strategies is of great importance as formulation of strategies tend to spend most time in implementation of strategies which helps the firms attain greater performance.

Based on the Higgin's 8-S's, effective execution of strategies relies on lining up key mechanisms in an organization (8-S's) with strategies the company intends to implement. Nonetheless, as a result of the dynamic environment and transformations observed in business environment it is important to constantly restructure strategies to be in line with transformations observed. This calls for constant readjustment of the 8-S's components to ensure that they match the strategy in focus, and this has proved to be the most challenging part for managers as they try to guarantee effective strategy implementation. Because components of the 8-S's are interlinked, it is important for organizations administrators to always ensure that all the eight components orient with the created strategy in order to have fruitful implementation of strategies and enhance performance (Higgins, 2005).

Empirical Review

Chan (2016) researched on core competencies and performance management in Canadian public libraries. The study used a survey design. The study identified 6 main competencies. The findings revealed that the most important competencies to enhance employee performance were skills such as communication, interpersonal, creativity and leadership, customer service, analytical, adaptability, planning and organizing, accountability, technological competence, organization's knowledge. To achieve superior performance and attain set goals, performance that is unsatisfactory in any competency requires action plan to enhance the necessary skill. This study focused on general competencies but failed to conduct in-depth analysis on staff competencies; thereby forming the conceptual gap filled by this current study. The study was on performance management while the present study will be on County Government performance. There is also the contextual gap that the study seeks to fill by conducting the study in developing countries like Kenya. A survey research design was used while the current study adopted descriptive and explanatory research design.

A research surveyed staff core competencies and organizational excellence was conducted by Puteh, Kaliannan and Alam, (2016). The study had an interpretative analysis and cross-sectional survey design adopted. A qualitative method through in-depth dialog with fifteen human resource management directors and managers in service-based industry in Malaysia was used to carry out the study. According to the findings, core competencies play an outstanding part for excellence in organizational performance despite different tasks, positions and nature of service-based businesses. There is still need to find out the effect of staff competencies by means of a quantitative research so as to establish these outcomes, in spite of the positive outcomes of this study. The 15 individual sample is small to allow the results to be generalized to a large population, this research will pursue to incorporate a considerable sample (379) that permit generalization of the conclusions. The contextual gap will be filled by conducting the study in the context of Kenya. The study used cross sectional survey design while current study adopted explanatory research design.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed positivism philosophy, descriptive and explanatory research design, and multi-stage sampling to draw a sample of 252 respondents from the target population of 735 respondents. The unit of analysis was the five counties in central region and the unit of observation was personnel in the County Government. Primary data was collected through structured electronic questionnaires. To analyze quantitative data, descriptive statistics were computed using mean scores and standard deviations while inferential statistics entailed use of multiple regression and analysis of variance to test the overall model using p-value <0.05. Tables, figures and prose were used to present results. The study adopted descriptive and explanatory research design which does more than describe the phenomena as it also explains it. This research design is often used to deduce the cause-and-effect relationship between variables (Pinto, Lein, & Mahoque, et al., 2018. The researcher starts with general ideas and uses the research as a medium for identifying issues that can be focused on for further studies. The aim of explanatory research design is to improve researcher's comprehension of a particular subject; flexibility of sources and to draw much better conclusions (Bryman & Bell, 2017). It assisted researcher to analyze the findings and draw informed conclusions.

Table 1: Target population

County	Kiambu	Kirinyaga	Nyeri	Nyandarua	Murang'a	Total	%
CECMs	10	10	10	10	10	50	6.80
Chief officers	13	10	11	10	9	53	7.21
Directors	62	29	48	36	36	211	28.71
Deputy/Ass directors	121	55	94	71	70	411	55.92
County secretaries	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.68
Secretary to PSB	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.68
Total	**208**	**106**	**165**	**129**	**127**	**735**	**100**

Source: County Human resource offices (2020)

This study's sample size for employees in County Governments was determined using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination formula (Russell, 2013). Using this formula, a representative sample was attained. The study's total population was 28973 employees of five County Governments in central province, Kenya.; while the target population was 735 persons.

The formula used for arriving at the sample size was.

$$s = \frac{x^2 NP(1-P)}{\left(ME^2(N-1)\right) + (x^2 P(1-P))}$$

Where:

s = sample size

x^2 = Chi-square for the specified confidence level at 1 degree of freedom

N = Population size

P = is the proportion in the target population estimated to have characteristics being studied. As the proportion was unknown, 0.5 was used.

Chuan and Penyelidikan (2016) indicate that the use of 0.5 provides the maximum sample size and hence it is the most preferable.

d=desired margin of Error (Expressed as a proportion)

The sample size resulting from this formula was 252 respondents. Sample size that lies between 30 and 500 at 95% confidence level is generally sufficient for many research due to a low level of error term at 5% (Yildrim & Sirrisek, 2006; Altunisik *et al*,2004).

Table 2: Sample Size

County	Sample	Proportion (%)
Kiambu	71	28.3
Nyeri	56	22.4
Nyandarua	44	17.5
Kirinyaga	37	14.5
Murang'a	44	17.3
Total	**252**	**100.0**

Source: County human resource offices (2020)

This study selected sample using multistage sampling technique. This technique splits large populations into groups to make the sampling procedure more practical. The population was first grouped in the different counties, then into different levels of top management personnel in each of these counties. This study then randomly selected the respondents from each group in all the departments of each County under study. These departments had a role in implementation of policy, projects, collection of revenue and delivery of services and therefore formed this study's main focus. The top-level personnel are composed of the County executive committee members (CECMs), chief officers, directors, assistant and deputy directors, secretaries to the County public service board and the County secretaries.

Table 3: Respondents of the study

County	Kiambu	Kirinyaga	Nyeri	Nyandarua	Murang'a	Total	%
CECMs	3	3	3	3	3	15	5.95
Chief officers	4	3	4	3	3	17	6.75
Directors	21	10	16	12	12	71	28.17
Deputy/Ass directors	41	19	31	24	24	139	55.16
County secretaries	1	1	1	1	1	5	1.98
Secretary to CPSB	1	1	1	1	1	5	1.98
Total	**71**	**37**	**56**	**44**	**44**	**252**	**100**

Source: County human resource offices (2020)

The study involved the collection of primary data using structured questionnaires. This enabled the researcher to obtain valid and objective data to ensure effectiveness of the data collection instruments, and the interpretations of data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2016).

Structured questionnaire contained closed-ended questions; these questions bore multiple choices that required response through ticking against the appropriate options given (Wester et al. 2014). Structured questionnaire was deemed appropriate for this study owing to the fact that it would increase the response rate since it makes it easy for one to respond to the questionnaire. The structured questionnaire enabled efficiency in coding and data analysis. The structured questionnaire also helped to prevent misconception of the idea of study by the respondents, and it facilitated evaluation of the views of respondent on research variables (Cooper & Schindler, 2018). The questionnaire was administered digitally as an e-questionnaire sent as a link to respondents. This allowed respondents enough time to respond to all the queries in the questionnaire. The questionnaire had five-point Likert scale items. Research assistants were recruited and used in data collection.

A pilot test involves carrying out a preliminary test of tools and procedures of collecting data in order to establish whether there are any problems/errors and eliminating them, it reveals vague questions and unclear instructions, captures suggestions and comments that are important, and helps to improve on the efficiency of the data collection instruments. Results obtained from a pilot test allows for modifications and adjustments to be done on both tools and procedures before the actual data collection is done (Mohamed, 2018).

In this study, pilot test was conducted in one County and results that were obtained used in testing if the questionnaire was able to give reliable and valid data. As Cooper and Schilder (2018) asserts, the rule of thumb for pilot test sample is utmost 10% of study sample size. This study selected 10% of study sample size to be used for pilot test; the proposed one County pilot test was within the recommendation. The pilot study was conducted using the same instrument that was administered to respondents during the main study. The question content, wording, sequence, lay out and instructions were checked, and feedback obtained considered for the improvement of the questionnaire.

Thirty top level personnel of the executive arm of Laikipia County were involved in the pilot study though responses received did not form part of final results. This formed 11.9% of the total sample in our study which was sufficient according to Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003 who has stated that 10% is sufficient. Finally, the pilot survey was used to draw respondents' responses regarding the design and content and also their suggestions on ways of enhancing efficiency and administration practicality. Alpha coefficients were used to test for reliability where greater values suggest high reliability. The threshold of reliability is alpha values of 0.70 and above (Cooper & Schindler, 2018), which is what this study adopted.

The study applied the use of Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency in determining reliability of research instrument and this was computed using SPSS. This method provided the measures of average for the items that are measurable and their correlations. According to Jooste and Fourie (2019), the value of Cronbach's Alpha should lie between 0 and 1. Hair et al (2018) indicated that an acceptable threshold value for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7 and above. The study therefore adopted 0.7 as the acceptable threshold value for reliability of the measures. A pilot study was then conducted, and the scores obtained correlated using SPSS.

Content validity was applied in evaluating the extent to which data gathered using certain instrument represent a particular area or content of an actual concept (Kothari, 2017). Theories that inform major themes were reviewed to determine existence of construct validity. Opinion from experts was solicited to check on the validity of the questionnaire. Academicians and senior researchers are experts whose opinion was sought by sharing the document with them and their suggestions facilitated improvements in research instruments and enhanced face validity. The researcher also conducted literature review for the purpose of identifying concepts of relevance which enabled researcher identification of various dimensions and concepts that relate to organization performance and imperatives on implementation of strategy.

External validity which is the extent to which the research findings can be generalized was established by ensuring that the samples are representatively selected so as to ensure that the findings can be generalized to the Kenya County Government population.

Inferential analysis of data was conducted by use of one-way ANOVA, Pearson R, and multiple regression analysis. Pearson R measured how strong and direction of relationship between variables. If correlation coefficient R values are closer to one (1), then the relationship between two variables is strong.

One-way ANOVA was used to determine whether there were any statistically significant variations in respondent's perception on management commitment across the five counties. The study carried out ANOVA with the fulfilment of the assumptions of normally distributed data and sample being drawn from a normally distributed population and the dependent variable being quantitative in nature.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between management commitment and County Government performance. It was used on data that is normally distributed, which had been drawn from a normally distributed population, had linearity and had been measured in ratio or interval scale (Polonsky & Waller, 2005). Having measured the data on five-point Likert scale, it was assumed to be interval in nature and therefore this statistic is deemed appropriate for this study.

Multiple regression Analysis is a predictive analysis used to explain the relationship between dependent and independent variables. It assumes that regression residuals are normally distributed, linear relationship between dependent and independent variable, homoscedastic residuals, no multicollinearity (independent variables are not too correlated); this analysis was used to test the strength of the effect management commitment had on County Government performance (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2018). Regression can estimate the coefficients of the linear equation, involving one or more independent variables, which best predicts the value of the dependent variable (Cooper & Schindler, 2017).

As stated by Gujarati (2015), causation models are best explained by linear regression analysis. Normality was tested by checking through Shapiro-Wilk, Pearson's R and exploratory factor analysis had been done to reduce the data set in readiness for multiple regression analysis. Strategy implementation imperatives items with a loading greater than 0.5 were transformed into new variables for use in multiple regression analysis. Each respondents' score on items chosen through exploratory factor analysis were computed into a composite score and then reduced into a single composite index to make analysis easy for management commitment and County Government performance respondent's score item. The researcher examined the F- statistic to see if the regression equation was appropriate, after which the R and R2 values were determined to check correlation between predicted values and observed values of dependent variable and R2 to indicate the percentage of variation explained by the regression equation. If value of R be higher than zero, meaning strategy implementation imperatives and County Government performance are correlated, then R2 was checked to give the degree of correlation and tell if the model fit in regard to the predicted values (cooper & Schrindler,2003). The gradients (ß) and t statistics gave the extent and direction of the relationship of staff competence and County Government performance while the p-values guided on whether the coefficients were statistically significant and hence helped draw inferences and conclusions.

The empirical model for relationship between Staff Competence and County Government performance was as follows:

$Per_{cg}= \beta o + \beta_1 S_c + \varepsilon$……………. equation 1

Where:

$Per_{cg=}$ Composite index for County Government performance

βo =constant

$\beta_{1=}$ Beta coefficients

$S_{c=}$ composite index for staff competence

ε=error term

Diagnostic tests were carried out in which:

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) which is used to detect multicollinearity when performing regression analysis was closer to 1 indicating that multicollinearity symptoms do not exist. Since the results showed tolerance of 0.388 and VIF of 2.577; VIF <10, therefore the results gave sufficient evidence to fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that multicollinearity does not exist in the research variables.

Shapiro-Wilk test is used to test for normality of large sample datasets and the null hypothesis of normality is rejected if the p-value is less than 0.05. From the results obtained, the significance value presented in the "Sig" column is more than the level of significance which was used for analysis in this study indicating that the residuals follow a normal distribution. Therefore, the data gives enough evidence to fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the model residuals follow a normal distribution. The results indicate normality assumptions have been met and multiple linear regression can be conducted on the data

The other conditions for linear regression to be carried out is that there ought to be linear relationship of staff competence and county government performance. Researcher therefore looked out for outlier effects (Creswell, 2006) where results showed that the condition had been fulfilled. Scatter plots are good for testing the linearity assumption and were therefore adopted with the results being as shown below.
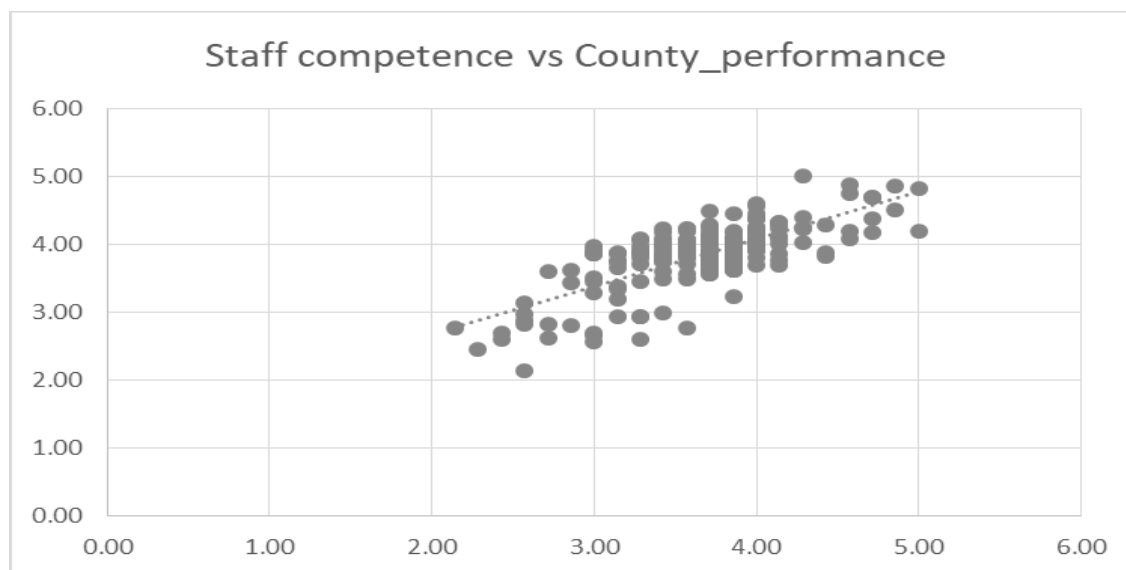
Figure 1: Scatter plot showing Staff competence vs County performance

The Breusch–Pagan test, was used to test for heteroscedasticity. It was used to test whether the variance of the errors from a regression is dependent on the values of the independent variables, in which case, heteroscedasticity would be present.

Table 4: Breuch-Pagan test for heteroscedasticity

Studentized Breusch-Pagan test
Data: model
BP = 15.584, df = 5, p-value = 0.008138

Source: Study data (2021)

The results above present the Breusch-Pagan test of heteroscedasticity. From the summary above, the p-value = 0.008 and is less than 0.05 giving sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of equal variances: Therefore, the results above gave evidence of heteroscedasticity in the data meaning that there was unequal variance. Weighted linear regression which incorporated the covariance matrix of errors in the model was used to deal with heteroscedasticity (Tilo, 2010).

The results showed the F-test for the model. The test F $(5,214)$ =112.298, p<0.000 shown in the "sig" column indicated that the model was statistically significant and was a good fit for the data. Therefore, the data gives sufficient evidence to conclude that the model can be used to significantly predict County performance using staff competence as the predictor variable.

Reliability test in which Cronbach's alpha was adopted and a threshold of 0.7 used as the criteria showed that staff competence had an alpha coefficient of 0.778 on the seven items of tests implying that the data was reliable

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics

Competency is a broad framework that describes the excellence of performance in an organization. According to the Higgins 8-S Strategy Implementation Framework (Higgins, 2005), through staff competency organizations communicate the required behaviors with respect to organizational roles. Staff competence is linked to performance since it entails the sufficiency of knowledge and skills that enable employees in the organization to perform their task (Aketch & Karanja, 2016).

The study focused on staff skills, staff trainings and staff placement and their effect on performance.

Table 5: Summary of staff competency items

		Mean	Standard deviation
	Staff skills		
1	The County staff have necessary knowledge and skills to enable them act in a wide variety of situations	4.37	0.725
2	Staff in the County have adequate experience to perform their duties	4.06	0.719
	Sub variable aggregate	**4.22**	**0.722**
	Staff trainings		
3	Staff appraisals are done to identify training needs that will enable them carry out their duties effectively	3.23	1.048
4	The County sets apart money for staff training in the budgetary allocations	3.53	0.929
	Sub variable aggregate	**3.38**	**0.989**
	Staff placement		
5	Employees are placed in their right jobs according to their qualifications	3.86	0.855
6	There is a professional approach in the conduct of the County's activities	3.65	0.764
7	The presence of staff with expertise and experience to execute plans and policies has led to improved performance of the County	4.04	0.695
	Sub variable aggregate	**3.85**	**0.771**
	Variable aggregate	**3.82**	**0.899**

Source: Study data (2021)

Table 4 presents the competency of the County Government staff. The items used to measure staff competency were rated on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3= fairly agree, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree. Staff competency had an aggregate mean of 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.899. Within staff competency, staff skills had the highest mean of 4.22 which the results indicated that the County staff have necessary knowledge and skills to enable them act in a wide variety of situations and that Staff in the Counties have adequate experience to perform their duties. Staff placement was the second ranked with a mean of 3.85. The study showed that the presence of staff with expertise and experience to execute plans and policies has led to improved performance of the County. The study also reported that employees are placed in their right jobs according to their qualifications and there is a professional approach in the conduct of the Counties' activities. Staff training had the lowest mean (3.38). The results suggests that Staff appraisals are not done to identify training needs that will enable them carry out their duties effectively. Competencies are very crucial within an organization since they enable staff to understand how to behave and the expected performance so that an organization can achieve its mandates. Competencies allow organizations to plan, recruit and enhance management and staff development (Mohammed & Muturi, 2018). Results presented above indicate high level of staff competency especially in functional competency. This according to research is linked to better performance in organizations (Mohammed & Muturi, 2018, Waimea, 2014, Matunga, Ngugi & Odhiambo, 2021).

Test of Hypothesis.

The following null hypothesis was tested.

H_{01}: Staff competence has no significant effect on performance of County Governments in the Central region in Kenya.

One of the objectives of this study was to evaluate the effect of staff competence on County performance. The corresponding null hypothesis stated that Staff competence has no significant effect on performance of County Governments in the central region in Kenya. A regression model was developed to provide information on the hypothesis. Results presented on table 33 shows the coefficients of the regression model. The beta coefficient associated with staff competence was 0.211 and a p value < 0.001. The results give sufficient information to reject the null hypothesis hence concluding that staff competence have a significant effect on County performance and can be used as a predictor for County performance. In line with the Higgins 8-S Strategy Implementation Framework (Higgins, 2005), organizations value their staff as a strategy to achieve their strategic purpose. Therefore, for organizations to achieve their purpose, they encourage their staff to sharpen their competence through facilitation of trainings, creating environment for personal and professional growth among other strategies.

This objective was developed to fill the gap identified in Chan (2016) which focused on general organization competencies creating the need to study individual staff competencies and how the influence the overall performance of an organization. Puteh, Kaliannan and Alam (2016) carried out research to study staff core competence and organizational excellence. The researchers reported that core competencies had a great impact on organizational performance. The results of the present study are supported by the findings by Basalamah (2017) who studied the influence of motivation, competence and individual characteristics on performance of clerk in the city of Makassar. The study reported significant correlation between staff competence and employee performance. The present study also filled a gap identified by Basalamah (2017) who studied individual performance other than general organization performance.

Researchers have studied how employee competence influence implementation of several government functions Toroitich, Mburugu and Waweru (2017) and Apiyo and Mburu (2016) assessed the effect of employee competence on implementation of electronic procurement and procurement planning in County Governments respectively. Their results suggested that Staff competence was an important factor in the roles and had significant effect in the output of the employees.

Table 6: Summary of the test results for the study hypothesis

Hypothesis	Findings	Decision	Conclusion
H_{01}: Staff competence has no significant effect on performance of County Governments in the central region in Kenya.	P=0.000<0.05	Reject H_{01}	Staff competence has a significant positive effect on performance of County Governments in the central region in Kenya.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings showed that staff competence had positive significant effect on county government performance in central region of Kenya. The respondents agreed that the staff had the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them act in a wide variety of situations, that they are placed according to their qualifications, and they have adequate experience to perform their duties. The conclusion on this hypothesis was explained based on respondent's demographic characteristics, the descriptive statistics of the variable, previous research, and Higgin's 8s' framework. The study findings concur with previous studies reviewed. Puteh, Kaliannan and Alam (2016) carried out research to study staff core competence and organizational excellence and reported that core competencies had a great impact on organizational performance. The results of the present study are also supported by the findings by Basalamah (2017) who studied the influence of motivation, competence, and individual characteristics on performance of clerk in the city of Makassar and found that there is significant correlation between staff competence and performance. The demographics showed that most of the respondents had a bachelor's degree and therefore were competent to understand staff competence concept and the right target group to respond on items under this variable. The respondents belong to the top-level management level which is also engaged in supervisory role in the county governments and are therefore well placed to respond on competence of staff under them. Theoretically, in line with Higgin's 8s' framework, staff are considered as an important manpower that assists an organization in attaining their strategic purpose as it defines population required, their skills, background, character traits and aptitude. The culture that an organization creates to ensure it successfully attains its strategic goals relates to common values which are commonly held and shared by the staff. This implies that there is need therefore for staff to have necessary competences which can be enhanced, and new capabilities generated through trainings to facilitate acquisition of new skills as well as create an understanding that matches with the constantly changing environment.

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