

THE EFFECT OF CORE COMPETENCY ON PERFORMANCE OF MURANG'A COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN KENYA

¹Joel Ngugi Kibugi, ²Dr. Nancy Githaiga, ³Dr. Alice Omariba

^{1,2,3} School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences: Murang'a University of Technology, Murang'a, Kenya.

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Abstract: This study determined the effect of core competency on performance of Murang'a County Government as the case of research. Core competency was measured using required knowledge, professionalism, self-development and team work. The study employed a descriptive research design. The quantitative data was collected with the use of a questionnaire and was analysed using STATA 14 statistical package. Qualitative data however was collected using interview guide and thematic analysis was used in data analysis. The study targeted Murang'a county employees and the sample size was 353 respondents. The study used descriptive statistics for descriptive analysis and present the result using graphs, tables, figures and charts to enhance clarity and impact. The findings of the study were further presented using figures, tables and graphs. The study found out that core competency has a significant positive effect on organizational performance. It is recommended that on core competency there is a need to have professionals run the affairs of Counties not politicians. Policies should be put in place to determine the kind of professionals that are needed to work in leadership positions in the county level. From a policy point of view, the study recommends that the national government should institute a change management process that will see into it that leaders within county governments are well trained on the dynamism that comes with devolution as well as on human resource development systems that will ensure in the future there is knowledge retention within devolved units for better service delivery. In the quest to improve employee participation and attendance to participation, employee participation forums should be conducted during weekends. Further, the study recommends internal audit in departments to prepare continuous reports on employee involvement.

Keywords: Participatory Management, Employees' Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the world, employees' performance remains as a valued input to achieve output, efficiency and worth in giving perception to performance (Gabcanova, 2011). In describing employees' performance indicators, Lee and Sukoco (2007) propose that performance of employees is a dynamic concept and separately every performance degree is important regardless of the parameters used to measure it. According to Hitt, Ireland, Camp and Sexton (2011) employees' performance is the building block of an association irrespective of its scope and the lone element converting resources into goods and services to offer a competitive advantage.

Performance is critical to any organization. According to Bach and Sisson (2005) performance is the success rate of individuals after their efforts. It is argued that the main concern in any organisation is how to increase staff performance. This could lead to efficiency and effectiveness which results to improved service quality and increased productivity. In the past two decades, studies have indicated that organizational performance is affected by staff participation. For instance,

Dust and Afraz (2011) showed that participation enhanced performance and caused staff to feel accepted and involved in the organization. This is because when staff participate in decision making, a sense of ownership in the organization is created which leads to reduced wastage, job quitting, and at the same time increases performance, commitment, job satisfaction and organizational efficiency.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Organizational performance is defined as how effective and efficient a firm strives towards attaining its goal (Boland and Flower, 2000). Organizational performance also refers to the ease with which an organization attains its goals. One cannot speak of performance without bringing in an element of performance management. Boland and Flower (2000) states that the main objective of organizational performance is improving and promoting employee effectiveness, therefore, participative management is a way of achieving employee effectiveness. According to Georgopoulos and Tannenbaum (2014), organizational performance also refers to the extent to which an organization has fulfilled its objectives as a social system. But organization performance has been evolving over time and later in 1980's and 1990's, as the organization objectives became more complex, organization performance definition changed to how an organization accomplishes its objectives in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

According to Kaplan and Norton, (1992) organization performance refers to how well an organization is doing to reach its vision, mission and goals. To assess the performance of an organization, Kaplan and Norton (1992), developed a tool known as balanced scorecard which helps managers resist the temptation of putting more emphasis on financial measures but also measure non-financial parameters. This study recommends that both employers and employees should better understand how an organization works and adhere to the organizational policy. The organizational performance scorecard should consider the following parameters: learning and growth parameters, internal business process parameters, financial and customer focus parameters. Learning and growth parameters should ensure there is constant growth as a result of innovative mechanisms laid down by the organization.

In their paper on the perception of citizens on the performance of the Kenyan government, Lumadede, Margaret and Sang, (2016) states that public organizations performance is determined by various factors such as accountability, civic engagement and efficient service delivery. Public organization performance emphasizes on timeliness when it comes to public services hence many public institutions have devised methods of appraising performance of public officers. Some public organizations have even gone a notch higher to engage offices on contractual basis to ensure they perform at par. According to Valerie and Berry (1985), service quality refers to an organization's ability to meet the expectation of its customers. When the expectation of the customers is compared with that of the supplier the result is what is commonly known as the perceived service quality. There are always three possibilities: expectations being equivalent to performance or expectations being less than or greater than the performance. Service quality is satisfactory when the expectation is less than performance. According to Keller and Kotler (2009), empathy, assurance, responsiveness and reliability are the variables in measuring the quality of any service offered. These variables are very critical in measuring the performance of an organization.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Public organisations have in the recent past faced financial and non-financial challenges which have affected the performance of organizations. For instance, world economy was hard hit by both the 2008 financial crisis and Covid-19. Further, corruption, lack commitment among public officers, nepotism, and gender insensitivity have also been credited for the poor performance recently experienced in both private and public corporations. Many government entities have posted poor results and this have forced the management to embark on reforms such as corporate restructuring and privatization of parastatals to improve efficiency and effectiveness in public entities. This will have a ripple effect in terms of performance and in terms of improvement in returns. But according to Mueni (2014), the results posted by public entities is not only about the welfare of the employees but also factors such as poor performance as a result of embezzlement of funds, lack of accountability among public and state officers, and unethical behaviours of some employees of the state corporations. According to Mueni (2014) embezzlement, lack of accountability and unethical behaviours are among many factors that affects organizational performance. These factors touches purely on core competency of the employees, hence the need of further study to determine how core competency affects organizational performance. Consequently, the current study seeking to establish the effect of core competency on performance of Murang'a County Government.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of core competency on performance of Murang'a County Government in Kenya.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To determine the effect of core competency on performance of Murang'a County government.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What is the effect of core competency on performance of Murang'a County Government?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical review highlights appropriate theories to be employed in the study. The study will employ contingency theory, resource-based theory and stewardship theory.

THE CONTINGENCY THEORY

In the year 1996 House developed a theory called Contingency theory. The theory lies on the foundation that managing an institution has no specific method. The theory emphasizes the five functions of management: planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling. Contingency theory is critical to management practice as it explains how the functions and design of any organization is affected by various contingent factors. The contingent factors include external environment, culture and technology House (1996). Contingency theory assumes that no particular structure and design of an organization can be applicable to all institutions. Arising from the assumption that no particular design or structure of an organization is applicable to all institutions, a contingent leader should be willing to any style depending on the situation at hand. Jago and Vroom (2009) states that participative management to be effective and efficient, the management must embrace strategic leadership through using the individual leaders' skills in making sure that the organizational strategy is well implemented to aid in attaining organizational goals. Further, strategic leadership opt not to be rigid but flexible in order to take into consideration the varied tastes and needs of the organizational clients (Morgan, 2007). The management team should ensure that there are strategies to ensure that plans are implemented and subordinates are well directed and also ensure the organization is staffed with competent and knowledgeable employees. This theory emphasizes on the need of situational analysis of each and every situation before choosing on a particular way of leading an institution hence the county governments should adhere to this principle while selecting the appropriate theory of management.

Contingency theory though supported by many scholars is not without critics. Galunic and Eisenhardt (1994), criticized contingency theory for static. They posit that the theory does not take into consideration the changes in the organization in terms of technological, demographic, economy and political.

RESOURCE -BASED THEORY

Proponents of resource-based theory suggested that organizational resources are limited, difficult to imitate, rare and valuable for the success of a firm. These resources are critical for both the short-term and long-term success of any organization. The proponents assert that availability of strategic resources is key for the success of any organization. These resources can also be in terms of human resource such that for an organization to perform well the employees both the managerial and support staff should be qualified and experienced for the job. This will give a positive impression of the organization hence will propel the said organization to success by giving a competitive edge over others.

Resource-based theory states that a competent and experienced human resource are the engine to the success any organization. Competency of employees stems from continuous development programs staffs are taken through to skills acquired through continuously doing a particular job. Collins and Clark (2003), however posit that the uniqueness and knowledgeability of staff may not necessary transform towards the success of the organization.

Clark and Collins (2003), posit that the view of resource-based theory is that the competencies of employees of an organization is critical for the organization to be a going concern. Clark and Collins (2003), further state that competency-based human resource management practices act as a basis to nurturing and embracing the competency within a particular

department or an organization as a whole. The proponents of resource-based view argue that firms should give priority to its employees when it comes to using its resources instead of looking for employees of other firms.

STEWARDSHIP THEORY

The theory on stewardship was proposed by Davis and Donaldson in the year 1989. The theory supports the conclusion of theory Y as advanced by Douglas McGregor. Which states that employees are motivated and takes pride in their jobs hence do not need close supervision. Stewardship theory asserts that managers are stewards hence act more responsible when working without close supervision. Davis and Donaldson (1989) posit that the proponents of the theory of stewardship assume that making consideration on behaviors' on pro-organizational and self-serving, a steward go for working together as opposed to defection. They further state that the theory assumes that managers (stewards) are trustworthy, pro-organizational and collectivists.

Fama (1980) posit that the senior management honour their part of bargain as a way of enhancing their profession through adhering to the due diligence and competency requirements. Other scholars such as Vishny and Shleifer (1999), emphasize that finances are returned to investors by managers to ensure that there is goodwill and reputation as they seek to re-invest the funds in the future. The theory has therefore been used to explain how stewards (management of the county governments) are categorised as diligent and accountable for the work done in the entire county government. According to Davis and Donaldson (1991), the stewardship theory further emphasized on liaison between the roles of the speaker and the governor of the county government. This will help in minimizing the associated agency costs.

The study perceives the management of Murang'a county government as the stewards and will hence give much importance to team work rather than disunity. The management are regarded as trustworthy and collectivists in their managerial duties on behalf of the citizens of Murang'a County. The above information makes stewardship theory more relevant for the study on participative management.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Core competency refers to a group of competencies that are widespread in an organization (Javidan, 1998). Further, core competency can also refer to that which differentiates an organization from its competitors (Barton, 2000). Core competencies can therefore be summarized as knowledge or skills learned by a particular employee and shared in the various organizational unit to assist in harmonization and integration of organization competencies. According to Barton (2000), learning process results into core competencies which is evident by effectiveness and efficiency of organizational processes and procedures.

Alrubaiee (2011) studied the impact of core competency on the performance of organization. The dependent variable (core competency) was measured using empowerment, co-operation and shared vision. The study employed the use of qualitative data which was collected using two data collection instruments (electronic survey and open-ended questionnaire). The study concluded that there is a strong positive relationship between core competency and organizational performance. The study recommended managers to increase organizational performance by embracing cooperation, empowerment and shared vision in order to remain competitive.

Taylor (2010) examined the effect of core competencies on organizational performance in the United States of America. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. Closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect qualitative data whereas data collection sheet was used to collect quantitative data. The research design used was descriptive research design. STATA software was used to analyse data. Both tables and figures were used to present the data analyzed. The independent variable was measured using leadership skills, creativity culture and quality of employees. The study concluded that core competencies have a strong positive effect on the performance of an organization. Leadership skills is the main factor that affect the performance of an organization.

Lufthans (2012) assessed the effect of strategic leadership on competitiveness of banks in the United States. Inferential research design was used in the study. The study used primary data which was collected using closed-ended questionnaire. Piloting was done on establish the effectiveness and efficiency of the data collection tool. Data was analyzed using SPSS software. Data presentation tools such as figure and tables were used by the researcher to analyse the relationship between

the independent and dependent variables. The study revealed that strategic leadership significantly affect competitiveness of banks in the United States. The study recommended that for strategic leadership to be effective participative management should be emphasized in order to enhance competency in the organization.

Vera (2001) studied the relationship between applying employee involvement and the retention of employee in the public organizations in Kenya. The study was conducted on the public organizations listed on Nairobi Securities Exchange. The study employed descriptive research design. The primary data was used by the researcher was collected using questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed and hand delivered to the respondents. STATA and excel software were used in the data analysis. Figures and tables were used as means of displaying and presenting the data of the researcher. The study concluded that employee involvement has a significant positive effect on employee retention in the public organizations in Kenya. The study recommended that public organizations in Kenya should fairly remunerate their employees and put into place better working terms, ethical practices and conducive working environment to ensure employees are retained.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design refers to a logical sequence that connects the empirical data to the study's initial research and ultimately to its conclusion (Yin, 2003). The study employed descriptive research design in form of a survey. Descriptive research design defines the current situation as it is and tries to describe particular variables in the study (Herve (2008). Researchers use survey to get a description of opinions, attitudes, characteristics and or behaviours of a population (Mathiyazhagan and Nandan, 2010).The descriptive research design enabled the study to provide insights on how and why participative management affects the performance of the Murang'a County Government as organization. The study used qualitative and quantitative approaches to ascertain the extent to which the Murang'a County Government has adopted participative management and evaluate its effect on organizational performance.

This study consists of three thousand employees from the County Executive and County Assembly as the target population.

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Sampling refers to the selection of a population's portion. Omariba (2023) defines sample size as the relevant and appropriate unit of analysis deduced from research objectives and employed in determination of data collection scope. Accordingly, this research used Yamane's (1967) sampling formula in determining the size of the sample. The researcher in dividing the sample into three strata used stratified sampling technique to divide senior level of management, supervisory level of management and operational level of management. Random sampling was used in selecting the survey respondents within the three strata. According to Omariba (2023), every member of the population has equal and known chance of selection.

INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

In collecting primary data from supervisory and operational levels, structured questionnaires were used while semi structured interviews were used to collect data from senior level of management. Document guide was also used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaires used both close and open ended questions to give respondents freedom of response. Interval, ordinal and nominal questions was employed.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

According to Omariba (2023), validity of a research instrument refers to the degree to which data analysis tool depicts the phenomenon studied. The study established the content and face validity. Content validity emphasize on the capability of the tool to adequately cover the area under study while face validity establishes the degree to which the real phenomenon and results of the instrument are similar. According to Jebb (2021), validity of an instruments was tested by conducting a pilot test and employing a pre-testing method. A pilot test was conducted whereby ten percent of the respondents received (35 respondents) the questionnaires and responded back.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

A data collection introduction letter was obtained from the School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences Murang'a University of Technology by the researcher. Further, an authorization to carry out the research was sought and approved by National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. The researcher visited the county government offices and

distributed the questionnaires to the respondents. For accuracy and consistency, the respondents voluntarily completed the questionnaires as the researcher waited and collected on completion. The researcher also conducted interviews with consent from the county government management. The interview questions were addressed to five Senior Management Officers.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

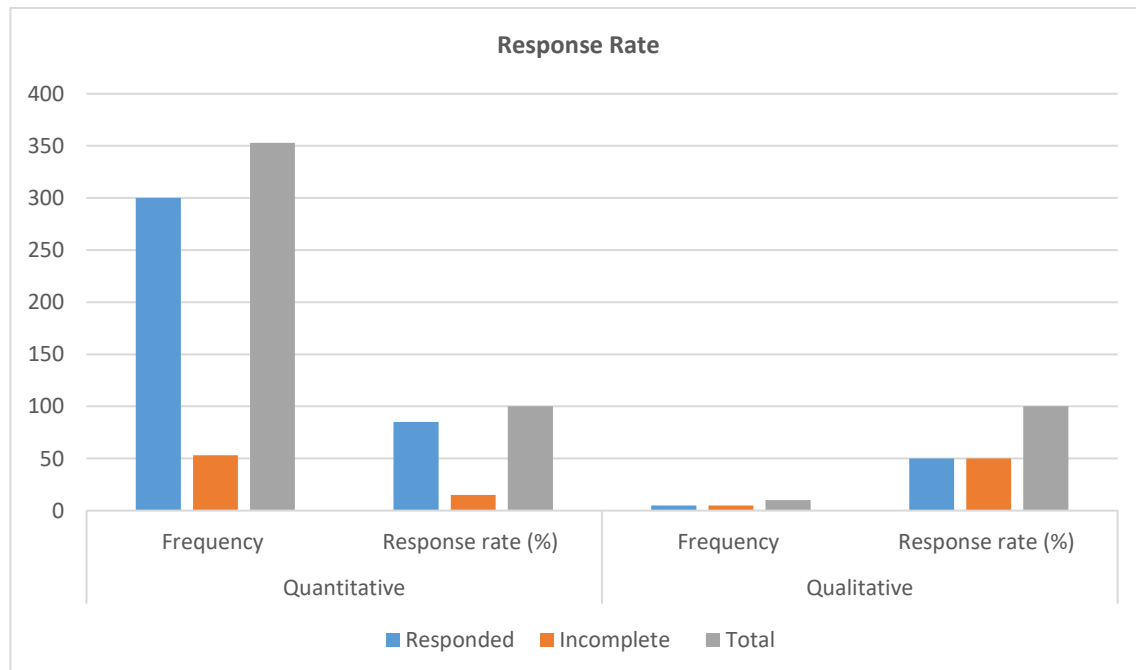
The researcher established core competencies in the organization this helped in identifying the effect of the core competencies on the organizational performance. The study used descriptive statistics for descriptive analysis and present the result using graphs, tables, figures and charts. It also used a four point Likert scale. For quantitative data analysis, the study used STATA 14 statistical package. Thematic analysis was employed in analysing the qualitative data. Presentation of the study findings was done using tables, figures and graphs to enhance clarity and impact.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The subsequent presents data analysis, findings and conclusion on the effect of core competency on the performance of Murang’a County government. Exploratory data analysis was conducted on trend analysis and descriptive statistics.

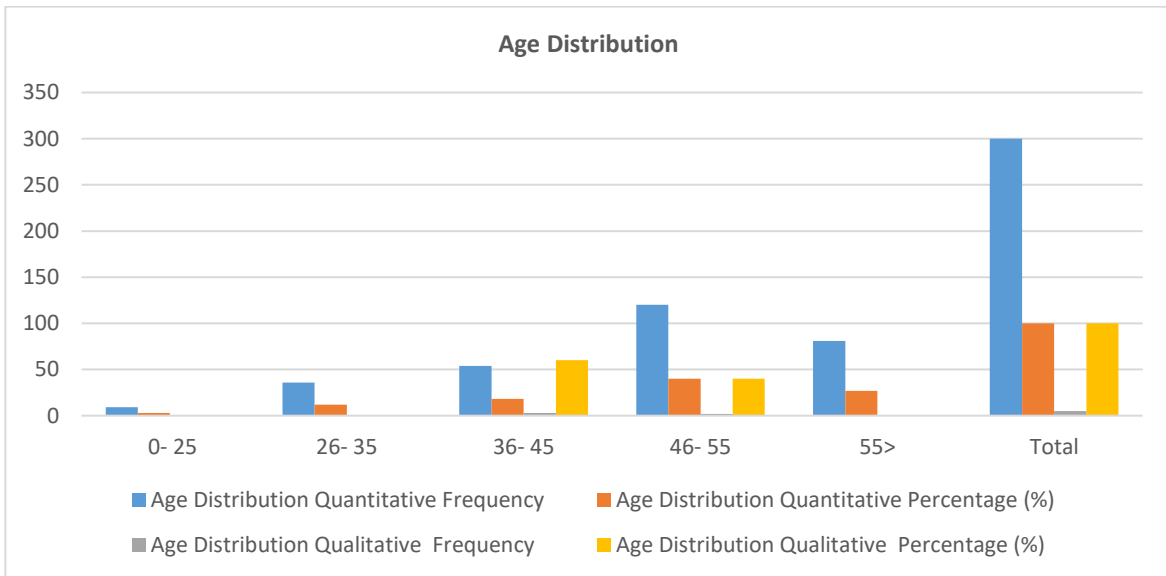
RESPONSE RATE

To collect quantitative data, the researcher distributed a total of three hundred and fifty-three questionnaires to the staff of Murang’a County Government according to table 3. Three hundred (300) representing eighty-five per cent (85%) of the respondents filled the questionnaires. In collecting qualitative data, the researcher only interviewed 50% of the expected respondents. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 50 per cent is adequate for analysis and reporting; a rate of 60 per cent is good and a response rate of 70 per cent and over is excellent. The response rate of eighty-five per cent is reliable and sufficient.



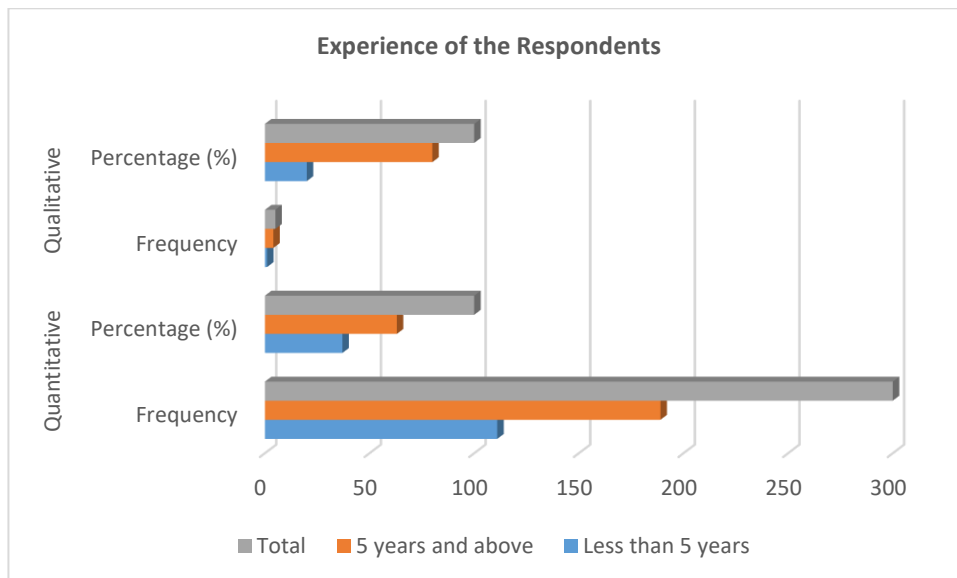
AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

The study sought to find out the age distribution of the respondents. The results in the Table 5 indicate that majority of the respondents for quantitative data were forty-six years and above at sixty-seven (67%). The remaining thirty-three per cent accounts for respondents with forty-five years and below. The respondents of the study there were majorly seniors with only fifteen per cent (15%) representing youth. For qualitative data all the respondents were between 36 and 55 years. This imply that Murang’a County rarely consider the youth for employment opportunities.



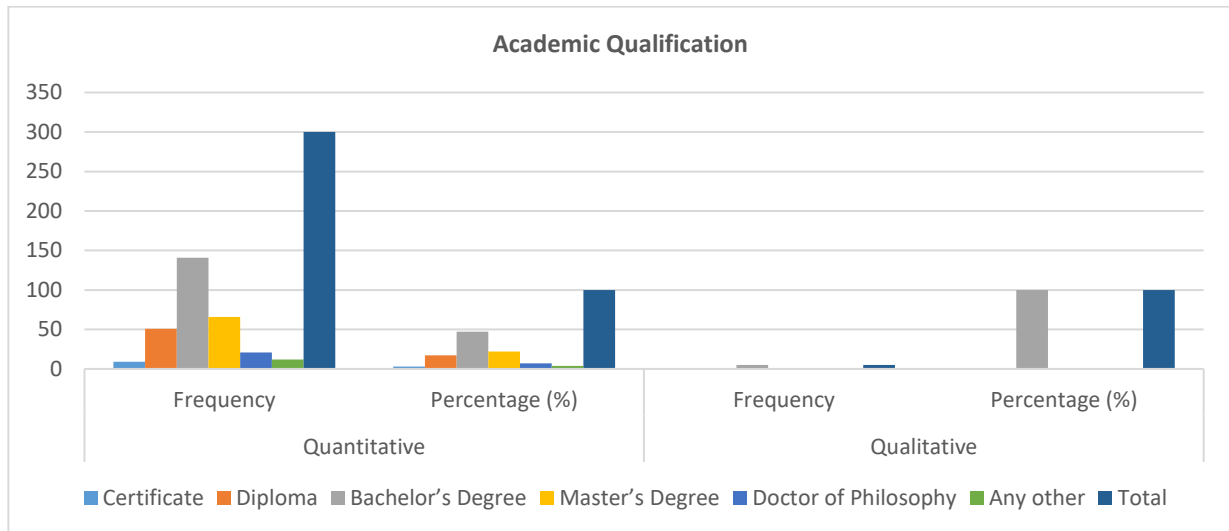
EXPERIENCE OF THE RESPONDENTS

The question sought to find out the level of experience of the experience. Questionnaire results in Table 6 indicate that one hundred and eleven (111) respondents had worked for Murang’a County for period of less than five years. This represent thirty-seven per cent. Majority of the respondents had worked for the county for five years and above. The interview results however indicate that 80% of the respondents had worked for Murang’a County for a period of over 5 years. The experience of the respondents was critical to the study in that it enabled the researcher to get critical information regarding budget performance form officers with the organizational memory.



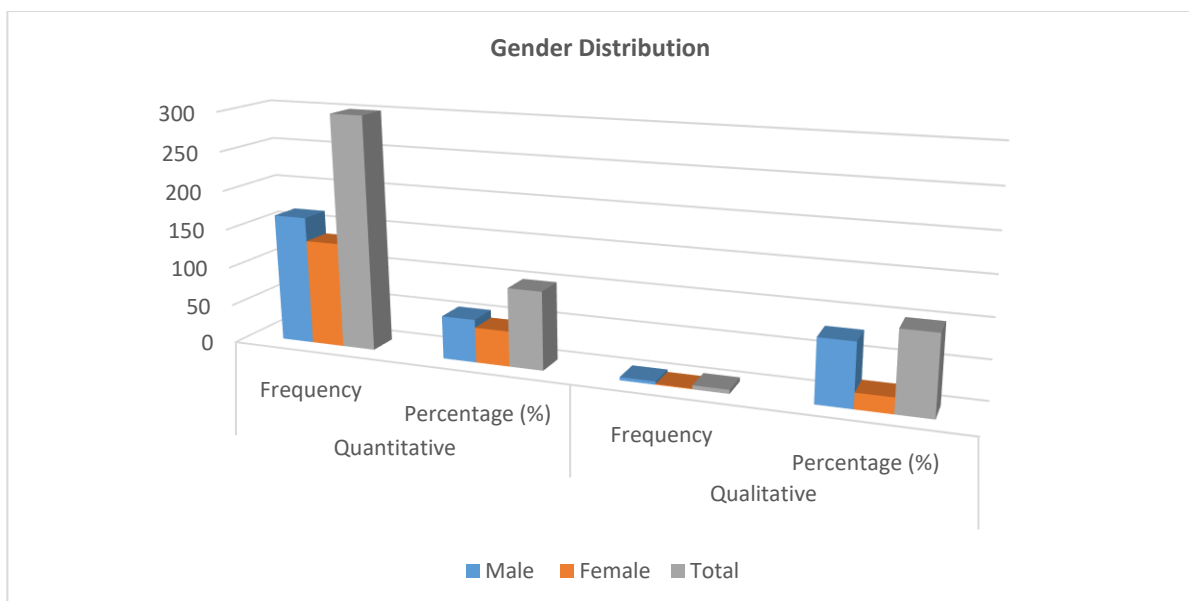
ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION

The study sought to find out the academic qualifications of the respondents. According to Table 7, Majority of the respondents are bachelor’s degree holder at forty-seven percent (47%). Followed by master’s degree holder at twenty-two per cent (22%), followed by diploma holders at seventeen per cent (17%). Coming forth are holders of doctor of philosophy at seven per cent, then any others and certificate holders at 4% and 3% respectively at the bottom of the hierarchy. Other certificates include professional courses and higher diploma courses.



GENDER DISTRIBUTION

The study sought to find out the gender distribution of the respondents. The results in Table 4 shows that only 20% of the respondents for interview were female. The table further indicate that fifty-five per cent of the respondents for quantitative data were male while forty-five per cent were female. This implies that the Murang’a County Government has implemented the two third gender rule by ensuring more than a third of the heads of departments are female. The study was critical in reducing biased and skewed response in terms gender (Victoria 2018).



CORE COMPETENCY ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The objective was to determine the effect of core competency on performance of Murang’a County Government as shown on Table 1.

TABLE:1

Statement	% of agreement or disagreement			
	SD	D	A	SA
Core competency affects performance of Murang’a county government	6	9	36	49
Murang’a county government employees have the required knowledge to accomplish their work	5	11	44	40

Murang’a county government employees are registered members of various professional bodies	5	13	39	43
Murang’a county government employees engages in continuous professional development programs	3	12	40	45
Murang’a county government employees are engaged in self-development programs	7	9	43	41
Murang’a county government employees values and embraces team work	3	15	38	44

Table 1 enumerates the responses from the respondents which were arrived to by ticking the four-scale Likert. The table shows that eighty-five per cent (85%) out of 100 respondents agree with the fact that core competency affects performance of Murang’a County Government with only fifteen per cent asserting the contrary. Eighty-four per cent (84%) of the respondents’ asserted that the county government employees have the requisite knowledge to accomplish their work. This is very important as it gives confidence to the professionalism and knowledgeability of the staff of the county. Further, a majority of the respondents at eighty-two per cent (82%) confirmed that majority of county staffs are registered members of various professional bodies such as the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Kenya (ICPAK), Law Society of Kenya (LSK), Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM), Institution of Engineers in Kenya (IEK), etc. this is very critical in asserting the professionalism of the officers.

Further, eighty-five per cent (85%) a confirmed that the county staff who are members of the said professional bodies are active members by engaging in various Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs organized by their respective professional bodies. In addition to staffs engaging in continuous professional development programs, the respondents also confirmed that staffs also register for personalized courses aimed at self-development such as advanced computer courses. Moreover, the respondents weighed on the concept of team work in the workplace. Eighty-two per cent (82%) of the respondents agreed that the county staff values and embraces team work.

Moreover, the interview questions were sampled to respondents and the results were as analysed below;

All the respondents unanimously agreed that core competency affected organizational performance. For instance, R4 revealed that the County Government employees were well endowed with knowledge and skills thus able to deliver high quality service to residents and achieve county strategic objectives. The second question was on whether the county employees had the requisite knowledge to carry out their tasks. R2 stated that most of the employees had the required skills to carry out the assigned tasks. R2 further added that the skills matched with their jobs. R4 rated employees’ skills at 8 in a scale of 0 to 10. R4 noted that *“Yes they do. In a scale of 0 to 10 I can rate their skills at 8. Zero being the least and 10 being the highest.”*

The research further sought to establish whether county employees were members of professional bodies. The respondents asserted that most employees were members of various professional bodies. According to the R5, approximately 85% of employees were members of professional bodies. In addition, the study sought to assess whether county employees engaged in continuous professional development programmes. Majority of the respondents were in agreement however, R1 noted that *“I agree. A good number of them engage in continuous professional development. However, some of them are at their comfort zones and hence they do not engage themselves in professional development courses. Or should we say they are just lazy?”* Moreover, the interview sought to examine whether there was team work among the employees and the extent it was embraced. Four out of the five respondents agreed that team work was fairly embraced among the employees. However, R1 pointed out *“There is minimal team work. They only work as team when circumstances force them to.”* noting that there was minimal team work and employees only worked in teams when circumstances demanded.

The findings of this study concurs with (Kaseya, 2016) who studied factors affecting the effectiveness of public participation in County Governance in Kenya: a case of Nairobi County. The findings also concurs with that of (Kurua, 2017) who conducted a study on the influence of employee participation on performance of the healthcare institutions in Kenya and concluded that core competency has significant effect on organizational performance. The study concluded that core competency has a significant effect on organizational performance in Murang’a County Government.

6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main objective of the study was to determine the effect of core competency on the performance of Murang'a County government. Core competency was measured using required knowledge, professionalism, self-development and team work. The respondents were put to task to confirm whether the county staff had the required knowledge to accomplish their work, whether the staff were registered members of various professional bodies, whether the county staff engaged in continuous professional development programs, if the staff engaged in self-development programs and if the staff valued and embraced team work. The study found out that core competency had a positive and significant effect on performance of Murang'a County government. The study therefore concluded that organizational performance was significantly affected by core competency.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of the study were based on the summary of findings after running the descriptive and diagnostic tests. The study concluded that core competency have a significant effect on the performance of Murang'a County government. This implied that failure by the county government to employ staff with the requisite knowledge, staff who embrace team work, great professionals and staff who engaged in self-development will have an effect on the performance of Murang'a County Government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the study were derived from the conclusions in the interest of enhancing core competency and the performance of the Murang'a County Government.

The study further indicated that political interference is a major concern in decision making within County setting. Therefore, there was a need to have professionals run the affairs of Counties not politicians. Policies should be put in place to determine the kind of professionals that were needed to work in leadership positions in the county level. These leaders should not just meet the professional competencies but ethical guidelines that will promote accountability, integrity and transparency in the county affairs. It was also important that counties must invest in efficient communication systems so that staff are abreast with the dynamism that devolution presents. With so many impeding changes in the county environment, County leaders should be keen on ensuring that staff are involved in the planning and implementation stages. They should also increase their personal competencies to understand the organizational environment.

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