

## Effect of Personal Attributes on Employee Performance in the Public Service in Kenya

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### Abstract:

*The legitimacy of any public service draws its breath from the capacity of responding to the needs of citizens in a way that is economically efficient. An emerging consensus among public sector experts is that in as much as public sector performance involves efficiency and outputs, it also involves the effectiveness of outcomes. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of personal attributes on employee performance in the public service in Kenya. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The study used a sample of 225 subjects out of whom 203 responded. Since the target population was heterogeneous, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed during sample selection. Data collection was by means of a questionnaire which had close ended items. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. Quantitative responses based on Likert scale were coded in the computer using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Processed data were then presented using simple frequencies and percentages, and summarized in Tables. The researcher also observed ethical and legal issues in research like the principle of confidentiality, anonymity, and acknowledgement of other people's input throughout the whole study. The study concludes that the influence of personal attributes on employee performance in the public service is statistically significant. The study recommends that there is need for organizations to improve personal attributes among employees, more especially in the public service where performance has been presumed to be generally low, in order to achieve the organization goals.*

**Keywords:** Personal attributes effect, personal attributes, Employee performance, Public service, Civil service

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### 1. Introduction

Public sector performance around the world has been experiencing a call for improvement in the recent past due to the fact that the sector employs a large number of people and also because the sector receives significant amount of funding from the government as well as the public. Restructuring and reforms in the public sector have been household names in recent times which have been aimed at improving performance and efficiency but from the experience of many public servants, the result has been redundancies, intensification of work and an increase in activities that do not make any material contribution to the delivery of services. The overall

result to public workers has not only been more work stress and less job satisfaction but also lower quality service being delivered to citizens (Boyle, 2006).

In today's economic environment, achieving heightened performance and efficiency is more important than ever to improve competitiveness, deliver better service, and reduce costs. Kenya adopted the Vienna Declaration on Building Trust in the Government which was arrived at during the Global Forum on Reinventing the Government held in Vienna, Austria, in 2007. Among the initiatives were; service delivery and access, transparency & accountability, increased access to information and communication technology, public private partnerships and innovation in public sector. According to Hope (2012), capacity building, better pay and benefits were also introduced to attract and retain managerial talent in the competitive market economy, a fact incorporated by Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC, 2011).

In addition, initiatives such as job evaluation, service delivery surveys, recruitment and training policy were introduced. In broad terms, Results Based Management (RBM) strategy was implemented with the aim of changing the culture and mode of doing work in the public sector. Furthermore, Rapid Results Initiative was introduced to operationalize the RBM strategy by focusing on results and fast tracking service delivery. By the year 2012, Performance Contracting had been adopted across the entire public service (Bourne, Neely, Mills & Platts, 2003; Staff Performance Appraisal Report, 2008; Office of the Prime Minister, 2009; Evaluation of Results for Kenyans programme, 2009 (b); Kobia & Mohammed, 2009).

Employee performance is a key element of the Social Pillar component of Kenya Vision 2030, the blue print guide to economic growth from 2008 to 2030. Optimal utilization of human resource is crucial in efficiency and effectiveness in quality service delivery to citizens hence, realization of the vision. Kenya Vision 2030 was formulated after successful implementation of the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERSWEC) strategy responsible for raising Growth Domestic Product from 0.6% in early 2003 to 7.1% in 2007 (Kenya Vision 2030, 2007). The overall goal of Kenya Vision 2030 is a globally competitive and prosperous nation with a high quality of life by 2030 as outlined in three pillars namely; economic, social and political.

In the Economic Pillar, Kenya aims at achieving Growth Domestic Product of 10% per annum with effect from 2012. In the Social Pillar, the aim of the Kenyan Government is to build a just and cohesive society ensuring equity in a clean and secure environment. In addition, the Government seeks to realize a democratic issue-based political society which respects rule of the law and protects rights and freedoms of all Kenyans as stipulated in the Political Pillar. Kenya Vision 2030 is operationalized through 5-year Medium Term Plans or Strategic Plans and yearly performance contracts (Republic of Kenya, 2002; Kenya Vision 2030, 2007; Economic Stimulus Programme, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2009; the Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

According to Odhiambo (2008), limited knowledge and competence building within the workforce compromised quality and limited access to information on programme-based budgeting have hindered employee performance in public service leading to poor service

delivery. The contribution by this author although limited to capacity building and budgeting has contributed significantly to the current research. Unfocused leadership, limited funds, poor evaluation and reporting system, lack of employee involvement in decision making and weak legal frame work to hinder employee performance. Employee involvement, training on performance contracting, employee participation, autonomy and investment into new technology were proposed as ways of improving employee performance. Other studies established that employee recognition improves employee performance (Atambo, Kabere, Munene & Nyamwamu, 2012; Kanyua, 2006; Maina, 2007; Ombonyo, 2007; Ougo, 2007).

The factors highlighted by previous researchers were collaborated by Onyango and Wanyoike (2014) who also included sense of belonging, self-worth and feedback which have a significant impact on employee performance. Further, Karuja and Mukuru (2013) suggested employee involvement, training on performance contracting, employee participation, autonomy and investment into new technology as ways of improving employee performance. Other suggestions were standardization of salaries as well as implementation of rewards and sanction scheme. Although, capacity building and adoption of technology have been embraced, failure of organizations to implement good work practices would pose challenges to employees' level of performance more especially in the public service. Thus, there was a need to examine the effect of personal attributes on employee performance in the public service in Kenya.

## **2. Methodology**

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which is suitable in describing the characteristics of a large population; it makes use of large samples, thus making the results statistically significant even when analysing multiple variables. The design also allowed the researchers to collect data, summarize, present and interpret it for the purpose of making concrete generalizations and suggestions for further research.

The target group comprised of 126,998 employees drawn from twenty ministries in Kenya. The study used a sample of 225 subjects which was calculated using Nassiuma (2000) finite sample size computation formula. Since the target population was heterogeneous, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed during sample selection. Data collection was by means of a questionnaire which had close ended items. Pilot testing of the instrument was done by administering the questionnaires to 10% of the total sample size.

Validity of the research instrument was determined through content validity while reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha value. A score of 0.75 was attained thereby qualifying the research instrument as acceptable and reliable. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. Quantitative responses based on Likert scale were coded in the computer using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Processed data were then presented using simple frequencies and percentages, and summarized in Tables. The researcher also observed ethical and legal issues in research like the principle of confidentiality, anonymity, and acknowledgement of other people's input throughout the whole study.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Demographic Characteristics

The study sought to establish the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Data captured included the gender, job category and educational qualification. The majority (60%) of the respondents were male while 40% were female. Among these, nearly a third (32%) of them had attained post graduate level of education, 25% were degree level, 21% had a diploma and the others, 22% had reached certificate level. In terms of experience, the majority (74%) of the respondents had served for more than 7 years, 19% had served for up to 6 years. The study also revealed that 67% of respondents were adequately while 20% were only fairly trained for their respective duties.

#### 3.2 Effect of Personal Attributes on Employee Performance in the Public Service in Kenya

The study sought to find out the effect of personal attributes on employee performance in the public service in Kenya. Respondents were provided with a table showing a range of major employee performance practices which are applicable to public service in Kenya. It was envisaged that their responses would reflect effect of personal attributes on employee performance. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the items provided. The categories of responses included: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. Table 1 shows the responses of the study participants against items.

Table 1  
*Effect of personal attributes on employee performance*

Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD
Effective management of service delivery	45%	45%	-	-	10%
Good vertical and horizontal communication in an organization	9%	36%	45%	9%	1%
Linking organizational strategy to achieved results	18%	55%	9%	18%	-
Timely production of quarterly and annual reports	36%	55%	9%	-	-
Adherence to policies and policy guidelines of the organization	36%	45%	1%	-	9%
Improved monitoring and evaluation of performance feedback	36%	36%	15%	9%	4%
Adherence to strategic plan of organization	18%	45%	25%	9%	3%
Adherence to service charter of organization	27%	55%	18%	-	-
Quality analysis of customer satisfaction reports	27%	45%	18%	10%	-
Implementing recommendations of training needs' assessment reports	27%	36%	15%	21%	11%
Improved employee sensitization and mobilization	-	55%	26%	19%	-

*Key: n=203; SA-Strongly agree; A-Agree; UD-Undecided; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree*

As shown in Table 1, an overwhelming majority (90%) of the respondents were in agreement that personal attributes lead to effective management of service delivery among civil servants. Nearly half (45%) of the respondents indicated that personal attributes contributed to good vertical and horizontal communication in an organization. However, there was another 45% who were not sure about whether it affected or not.

More than two thirds (73%) of the respondents reported that personal attributes link organizational strategy to achieved results in the civil service. An overwhelming majority (91%)

of the respondents were affirmative that personal attributes also contributed to timely production of quarterly and annual reports in the public service. A vast majority (81%) of the participants agreed that personal attributes led to adherence to policies and policy guidelines of the organization.

Nearly two thirds (63%) of the respondents indicated that personal attributes helped to improve the adherence to strategic plan in an organization. Another 82% of them agreed that personal attributes enhance adherence to service charter of the organization by the civil servants. On the other hand, over two thirds (72%) of the study respondents affirmed that personal attributes enhance analysis of customer satisfaction reports.

The majority (63%) of the respondents were in agreement that personal attributes enhanced implementation of recommendation of training needs' assessment reports. Over a half (55%) of the respondents supported that personal attributes improved employee sensitization and mobilization in an organization.

### 3.3 Association between Personal Attributes and Employee Performance in the Civil Service

The study sought to establish whether there is an association between personal attributes and employee performance in the public service in Kenya. The Pearson's Chi-square for independence was computed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Chi-Square test for the association between personal attributes and employee performance*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.388 <sup>a</sup>	11	.001
Likelihood Ratio	26.281	11	.010
Linear-by-Linear Association	.019	1	.891
N of Valid Cases	203		

*a Zero (0) cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.53.*

As shown in Table 2, the association between personal attributes and employee performance in the public service in Kenya is statistically significant since the p-value is smaller than the level of significance (.05),  $\chi^2(11, N = 203) = 25.388, P = .001$ . This shows that personal attributes significantly affect the performance of employees in the public service in Kenya.

### 4. Discussion

Majority (90%) of the respondents agreed that personal attributes leads effective management of service delivery among civil servants. This concurs with studies conducted by Burnes (2004); Scarborough and Carter (2000) in Armstrong (2009) that revealed, knowledge and skills of

employees have to be managed through individual and organizational or collective learning to enhance competitive advantage among the civil servants.

With regards to whether personal attributes ensure adherence to policies and policy guidelines of the organization, an overwhelming majority (81%) of the study participants agreed. Each employee in civil service requires to advance in their respective career by accruing appropriate skills which are relevant to the specific job description and this requires that career counseling is undertaken to help individuals develop their careers. Successful career development requires a strategy which includes policy on promotion and career routes for employees. In the same vein, the Public Service Commission works in liaison with directorates of human resource development within the public service to formulate appropriate policies such as career progression guidelines to guide career development among employees (Public Service Induction Booklet, 2008; Armstrong, 2009; Republic of Kenya, 2013a; Republic of Kenya, 2014a).

Nearly two thirds (63%) of the respondents indicated that personal attributes improve the adherence to strategic plan among employees in an organization. The finding of the study is congruent with the findings of a study conducted by Boudreau and Ramstad (1997) as cited in Wendy and Boudreau (2001) that found, organizations may be wise to focus alignment efforts throughout the organization, or at least strategically target to where it may matter most. Such efforts may include ensuring managers share information with all employees, allow and encourage employee participation in decisions affecting the organization and their job, and implementing new employee socialization efforts aimed at clearly linking employee behaviors to firm success.

Nearly two thirds (63%) of the respondents were affirmative that personal attributes enhance implementation of recommendation of training needs as suggested in assessment reports. Organizations in the public service undertake Training Needs Assessment (TNA) on regular basis to identify skills gaps before preparation of training projections. The study finding is in agreement with a study carried out by Hope (2012) who advocated for retraining of civil servants to cope with job demands and improve operational flexibility by acquiring a wide range of skills.

Over a half (55%) of the respondents supported that personal attributes improved employee sensitization and mobilization in an organization. This is in line with a study conducted by Burnes (2004) that found, most of the training in Japanese companies is done on the job with the dual aim of improving organizational performance and individual development although employees are expected to take responsibility of their own self-development. Generally, the Japanese government places emphasis on continuous development of employees for purposes of enhanced performance and promotion. Furthermore, training is a major component of any change project as it contributes to culture change due to enhancement of team work and interdepartmental cooperation. Many of the skills and competences that the organizations wish to develop in staff and managers are the same ones necessary for bringing about successful change.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a significant statistical association between employees' personal attributes and performance in the public service. It is evident that where employees have competent skills, well trained, advanced career development, highly motivated, positive attitude among other attributes, the level of their production tends to be higher than organizations where employees do not possess these attributes. This implies that the employees' level of performance is significantly affected by personal attributes. Thus, there is need for organizations to improve personal attributes among employees, more especially in the civil service where performance has presumed to be generally low, in order to achieve the organization goals.

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### **Suggested Citation:**

Kelemba, J.K., Chepkilot, R. & Zakayo, C. (2017). Effect of Personal Attributes on Employee Performance in the Public Service in Kenya. *Journal of Management and Business Administration*, 2, 19-35. Retrieved from <http://writersbureau.net/journals/jmba/effect-of-personal-attributes-on-employee-performance-in-the-public-service-in-kenya.pdf>

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