

Socio-Cognitive Diversity and Employee Performance in County Governments in Kenya

**¹Rose Wakonyo Kamweru, ²Susan Were, ³Yusuf Muchelule & ⁴John Karihe
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
Corresponding Email: kamwerurose6@gmail.com**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyse the influence of socio-cognitive diversity on employee performance in the county governments in Kenya. The study is anchored on conflict and contact theory. The study adopted a survey research design and the target population was 20,299 employees from 5 purposively selected county governments of Kenya. Stratified random sampling was used to sample 392 employees from the selected county governments. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The findings indicated that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance with the regression coefficient of ($\beta = 1.087$, $p < 0.05$). The study recommends policymakers establish a diversity policy that includes a requirement that the management of county governments; establish measurable objectives for achieving greater socio-cognitive and assess annually both the measurable objectives for achieving socio-cognitive and the progress in achieving it.

Keywords: *Socio-Cognitive Diversity, Employee Performance, County government*

1. INTRODUCTION

The workplace is becoming increasingly diverse in its composition than it has been previously witnessed. Workplace diversity is viewed the world over as being pertinent in the workplace. Organizations that promote and achieve an effective diverse workplace will attract and retain quality employees (Jayawardana & Priyashantha, 2019). In the past, insufficient attention has been paid to the concept of workplace diversity. The move to recognize it has been made in the recent past and it is being embraced, in part due to the legislative framework put in place by relevant organs of government in developed countries in the world which is being emulated by other developing nations. In addition, modern organizations have witnessed the desirable results of workplace diversity on employee performance which has driven them to accept it (Zhuwao, 2017).

According to Thapa, Phuyal and Regmi (2017), employees are regarded as one of the most critical assets of any organization. The success and prosperity of any organization depends to a large extent on the employee's qualities, capabilities, and skills which can be measured by their performance. Employees working in an organization might have a different set of skills, knowledge, and abilities. Some have different modes of working and can perform with the highest proficiency regardless of the incentive while others may have an irregular tendency of working (Omollo & Oloko, 2015).

Socio-cognitive diversity connotes heterogeneity in language, religion, race, and culture within teams in an organization. There has been a growth of research interest in multicultural in recent times with a view to improving employees' performance (Choi, 2017). The justifiable course for the increase in interest in the study can be attributed to the multicultural characteristics of the society. It has been averred that "ethnic diversity is highly relevant in an increasingly globalized world" (Kathimba & Anyieni, 2018). At average degrees the reality of diversity as a fact of life does not affect team performance in terms of business; even so, research has shown that when the majority of team members is ethnically diverse, then the more socio-cognitive diversity has a positive impact on performance (Baran'ga & Maende, 2019).

Even though County Governments have invested heavily in staff empowerment strategies since inception, including training at the Kenya School of Government and benchmarking activities, the effect on employee performance remains ambiguous (Auditor-General Report, 2018). It is further noted that since the adoption of devolved governments in Kenya in 2010 and the Cohesion Acts of 2008, the goals of the aforementioned which are hinged on employee performance remain largely unmet.

1.1 Problem Statement

According to a COG Statutory Annual Report (2018), the key challenges faced by county governments include weak performance management framework leading to subjective performance appraisal, setting ambitious targets that are not achievable, incomplete and poorly implemented gender policy, undeveloped persons with disability policy, and lack of training and capacity building of persons with disability. Auditor General Report (2018) reported that even though Kenya County governments have invested heavily in staff empowerment strategies, these have not resulted in improved employee performance. The public domain has been occupied with the inefficiency and low output that the county government employees exhibit. County government employees have been in the media for all the wrong reasons ranging from strikes, slows and absenteeism from work thus affecting their performance (Aljazeera, 2017).

Although performance aimed at achieving targets at the county governments is only attainable through a committed workforce, there is scant available evidence of workplace diversity in county governments in Kenya and how they influence employee performance in these devolved units. This study sought to fill the gap by focusing on the influence of socio-cognitive diversity on employee performance in county governments in Kenya.

1.2 Research Hypothesis

H₀: Socio-cognitive diversity has no significant influence on employee performance in county governments in Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

First purported by Karl Marx (1818-1883), conflict theory sees the society of human beings as a life full of competition for scarce resources. Karl Marx was a German philosopher and sociologist. Karl Marx looked at society and saw it as being made up of individuals in different social classes who must compete for social, material, and political resources such as food and housing, employment, education, and leisure time (Griffiths, *et al.*, 2015). Cultural and ethnic conflicts according to Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838-1909), Polish-Austrian sociologists, led to states being identified and defined as dominant groups (that is, "winners") that had power over other groups (Irving, 2007).

Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) aver that direct contact between different ethnic groups sub-groups and different gender have shown a reduction in a wide range of attitudes and behaviour. Likewise, Hewstone (2009) surmises that contact theory has the potential to breed tolerance and trust among diverse ethnic groups and different genders. In summary, contact theory works (Sturgis, Brunton-Smith, Kuha, & Jackson, 2014). Conflict theory has been criticized because it tends to focus on conflict to the exclusion of recognizing stability. Despite the criticism, when this theory is applied to a work setting, it helps to explain how socio-cognitive diversity can influence employee performance.

2.2 Empirical Review

Team diversity refers to the distribution of differences among the members of a unit with respect to a common attribute, such as tenure and ethnicity (Deng, Huang & Ding, 2020). Traditionally, most of the research in the field has focused on diversity or actual differences in member characteristics (Wijayawardena Wijewardena, Samaratunge, 2017) confirmed that a top management team's intrapersonal functional diversity is positively associated with firm performance. Shemla, Meyer, Greer & Jehn (2016) suggested that team diversity may lead to conflict among team members, thereby decreasing team performance. They stated that the very nature of these teams' diversity hinders team members from communicating, coordinating their work, and performing.

Empirical studies on socio-cognitive diversity have been conducted in various countries and sectors. In Singapore, a study on workforce diversity (age, gender, and ethnicity) and employee performance among 316 employees drawn from several and various sectors of economy found out by subjecting the collected data to correlation analysis socio-cognitive diversity is negatively insignificantly related to employee performance (Joseph & Chinnathambi Selvaraj, 2015). Nathan (2016) conducted a study on work ethnicity diversity among 2381 employees from various sectors in the United Kingdom and reported that there is a negative correlation between top management team (TMT) minority ethnic shares and turnover using correlation and regression (finite mixture modeling).

A study conducted on multilevel top management team nationality diversity and firm performance in Swiss among 146 Swiss listed firms representing 32 industries from different sectors, used correlation and regression analysis and reported that the consequences of diversity depend on specific aspects of diversity being considered, firm and industry condition under which strategic decisions take place (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2013). In Kenya, a study done in the banking sector among 221 middle-level managers from 43 commercial banks reported that a positive significant relationship between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance exists (Kyalo & Gachunga, 2015).

Socio-cognitive diversity was found to positively and significantly influence employee performance in a study conducted among 87 employees of KSG, using correlation and regression analysis (Maingi & Maingi, 2015). A neutral relationship exists between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance as found by Mwatumba *et al.*, (2016). The study was conducted among public servants in one of the counties in Kenya. (Mcmahon, 2010) based on a review of academic research for the period 2000-2009 concluded that as much as bio-demographic diversity was easy to recognize as it was obvious, task-related diversity (structural) and cognitive diversity (cultural) bore more significance and are hence more vital to observe in an attempt to comprehend workplace diversity and its true implications for employee performance.

The historical focus on objective diversity is being challenged by a growing line of research that focuses explicitly on the role of perceived diversity in teams. Perceived team diversity refers to the degree to which members are aware of one another’s differences, as reflected in their internal mental representations of the unit’s composition (Shemla *et al.*, 2016). Harrison and Klein (2007) confirmed that perceived diversity may have more proximal explanatory power than actual diversity. Researchers found that objective diversity in work teams has only an indirect influence on team outcomes, which is an effect that is mediated by perceptions of diversity.

In terms of individual employees, the perception of demographic diversity gives them less psychological attachment to other team members; perceived cognitive diversity indicates that individuals are aware that others differ in thinking styles, skills, ideas, and perspectives. The perception of demographic diversity is likely to cause relational conflicts (interpersonal emotional clashes), and perceived cognitive diversity is likely to boost task conflicts (i.e. disagreement on job-related issues) (Lo, Wang & Zhan, 2019). Thus, when team members perceive team diversity in demographic characteristics and educational or functional background, they easily encounter relational or task conflicts. These conflicts, which stem from perceived team diversity, have considerable potential to damage trust-building among employees. In line with communication visibility theory, if team members do not trust one another, then they are unlikely to trust information or knowledge provided by their colleagues.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design and the target population was 20,299 employees from 5 purposively selected county governments of Kenya. Stratified random sampling was used to sample 392 employees from the selected county governments. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics including proportions, mean and standard deviation was used to analyse data. Further, regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the study variables. The findings of the study are presented in tables.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Socio-cognitive Diversity

Socio-cognitive diversity was another variable of the study to establish its influence on employee performance. Table 1 below gives the results of the questions asked.

Table 1: Socio-cognitive diversity

	N	Not sure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
The majority of the ethnicities in Kenya are ably represented in the country.	297	17.2	18.5	22.9	25.6	15.8	3.0438	1.32852
There is value and respect for all customs and cultural values of all ethnicities in Kenya.	297	10.1	13.5	25.9	31	19.5	3.3636	1.22575
No one in the organization has ever been discriminated against on account of their ethnicity.	297	8.1	12.1	23.2	32.3	24.2	3.5253	1.21096
Negative stereotypes based on ethnicity are discouraged.	297	7.7	12.5	24.9	33.3	21.5	3.4848	1.1829

All Kenyan and other nationals are considered for appointment to vacant positions without discrimination in the county	297	10.8	14.1	23.9	26.6	24.6	3.4007	1.29098
Group objectives are clarified clearly	297	5.7	12.1	22.2	34	25.9	3.6229	1.15922
Group tasks are divided into interdependent subtasks	297	5.4	11.8	21.2	36.7	24.9	3.6397	1.13669
Group task roles are equitably assigned	297	7.7	10.4	23.9	36.4	21.5	3.5354	1.1652
The county provides opportunities for one to interact with people who are outside of one's team	297	6.4	9.4	22.9	36.4	24.9	3.6397	1.14262
The county encourages one to participate in informal networking opportunities	297	6.4	12.8	20.2	31.6	29	3.6397	1.20591
Aggregate Mean Score							3.48956	1.204875

From the research study, 15.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that ethnicities in Kenya are ably represented in their county while 25.6% of the respondents generally agree with that statement. 18.5% strongly disagree with that statement while 22.9% generally do not agree with the statement. This indicated a mean of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 1.3. 21.5% of the respondents strongly agree that their county discourages negative stereotypes based on ethnicity. 33.3% agree with that statement while 12.5% strongly disagree with that statement with a further 24.9% further disagreeing. The analysis indicated a mean of 3.4 with a standard deviation of 1.2, indicating that the data was spread around the mean. In addition, 26.6% of the respondents agree with the statement that Kenyan and other nationals are considered for appointment to vacant positions without discrimination in my county with a further 24.6% strongly agreeing with that statement. This constitutes over half of the respondents agreeing that such a practice of fairness is realized. However, 14.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed with that statement while 10.8% did not generally agree with it. The mean was 3.48 and the standard deviation of 1.2 showing that respondents moderately agreed that socio-cognitive diversity influenced employee performance.

The result is in agreement with Hoogendoorn and Van Praag (2016) that moderate impact of diversity does not impact the way the group performs in terms of the results of the business but if a majority of team members are diverse then socio-cognitive diversity will positively affect the way the group performs; the data suggested that the positive impact could be associated with a diversified pool of knowledge which facilitates learning in the ethnically diverse groups.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics on Employee Performance

This subsection is concerned with investigation of employee performance in county governments of Kenya. The findings presented in Table 2, 3, and 4, represent the respondents' responses to the indicators of employee performance adopted for this study that is attendance, target realization, and responsiveness.

Table 2: Attendance

	N	Not sure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
There are biometric controls to ensure timely attendance in my county	297	15.5	22.9	13.5	26.3	21.9	3.1616	1.40251
I can use the working hours with high productivity	297	4.7	12.1	19.2	38	25.9	3.6835	1.12444
There is recognition and reward for employees with the highest efficiency	297	9.1	14.8	20.5	32	23.6	3.4613	1.25176
The strategies to reduce absenteeism in my county have worked	297	9.4	12.1	19.9	32.7	25.9	3.5354	1.25725
Aggregate Mean Score							3.46045	1.25899

From Table 2, 48.2% of the respondents agree that there are biometric controls to ensure timely attendance in my county. However, 51.9% either disagree or are unsure whether such controls exist. The mean was 3.1 with a standard deviation of 1.4. 55.6% of the respondents agree that there is recognition and reward for employees with the highest efficiency while 23.9% either strongly disagree or are unsure about it, with a mean of 3.5 and a standard deviation of 1.2.

Table 3: Target realization

	N	59% and below Poor Performance	60%-79% Fair Performance	80%-99% Good Performance	100% Very Good Performance	101% Excellent Performance,	Mean	Std. Deviation
1st Quarter Report	297	5.4	31.6	37.7	16.5	8.8	2.9158	1.02155
Mid-year review	297	5.1	26.6	43.1	17.5	7.7	2.963	0.97709
3rd Quarter report	297	4	23.6	43.4	20.2	8.8	3.0606	0.97418
End year appraisal	297	5.4	19.5	35.4	26.6	13.1	3.2256	1.07472
Aggregate mean score							3.04125	1.011885

According to Table 3 above, 94.6% of employees achieved fair to excellent performance ratings in the first quarter. Only 5.4% were rated below performance. Majority of the employees rated good performance in the 1st quarter. The pattern is reflected in the end-of-year appraisal where 13.1% achieved excellent performance, 26.6% with very good performance, and 35.4% with good performance. A small 5.4% performed below poor of less than or equal to 59%. The Aggregate mean was 3.04 and a standard deviation of 1.01. The study findings showed that the county government employees reported that their net target realization showed good performance with a percentage performance of 80% to 99%.

Table 4: Responsiveness

	N	Not sure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
The county has a displayed service delivery charter.	297	10.8	12.1	20.5	30.3	26.3	3.4916	1.29217
There is proper queue control to avoid delays in this county	297	8.1	12.8	23.6	35	20.5	3.4714	1.18551
Some processes are expedited to avoid delays.	297	6.4	13.5	21.5	34.7	23.9	3.5623	1.17562
Customers are attended to within 10 minutes of their visit to our offices.	297	8.4	16.2	18.2	34.3	22.9	3.4714	1.24119
All correspondences are responded to within 5 days from the date of receipt	297	8.1	12.1	17.5	35	27.3	3.6128	1.2309
Aggregate mean score							3.5219	1.225078

From Table 4, 56.6% of the respondents agreed that the county has a displayed service delivery charter. A total of 43.4% either disagreed or were unsure whether there was such a charter. The mean was 3.4 and a standard deviation of 1.2. A total of 55.5% of the respondents agree that there is proper queue control to avoid delays in their county. 57% of the respondents agree that customers are attended to within 10 minutes of their visit to their offices. 16.2% strongly disagree with the statement. 27.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that all correspondences are responded to within 5 days from the date of receipt while 35% generally agreed with it. The data mean was 3.5 with a standard deviation of 1.2. The average mean for the variable employee performance was 3.3 showing that the employees disagreed moderately to the statement that workplace diversity influenced employee performance. These findings are in tandem with Khan *et al* (2019), who found that there was a positive effect of workplace diversity on employee performance.

4.3 Influence of Socio-cognitive Diversity on Employee Performance

Results in Table 5 show the results of regression analysis revealing that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance with the regression coefficient of ($\beta = 1.087, p < 0.05$). This means that an increase in socio-cognitive diversity leads to an increase in employee performance in county governments in Kenya. Socio-cognitive diversity reported an R-value of 0.721 and R^2 of 0.518 which means that 51.8% of corresponding variations in employee performance are explained by socio-cognitive diversity.

Table 5: Model Summary for Socio-cognitive Diversity and Employee Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.721 ^a	0.519	0.518	0.59575

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used in this study to establish the significance of the regression model. The statistical significance was regarded as considerable if the p-value was less or equal to 0.05. The findings in Table 6 illustrate the consequence of the regression model

with p value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. The results also demonstrate that the regression model was statistically noteworthy in predicting the influence of socio-cognitive diversity on employee performance in the county Governments in Kenya. The ANOVA results indicate that the F-critical (1,295) was 3.841 while the F-calculated was 318.196. This shows that the F-calculated is greater than the F-critical; therefore, there is a positive significant linear association between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance. This means that when there is variation in socio-cognitive diversity, there is a considerable variation in employee performance. In addition, the p-value was 0.000, which is less than the significance level (0.05). This comprises goodness of fit of the model predicting the positive and significant influence of socio-cognitive diversity on employee performance.

Table 6: ANOVA Results for Socio-cognitive Diversity and Employee Performance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	113.190	1	113.190	318.916	0.000 ^b
Residual	104.702	295	0.355		
Total	217.892	296			

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

The findings of this study revealed a positive relationship between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance with a standardized coefficient of 0.312. The relationship is also significant with p-value = 0.000 (since $p < 0.05$), therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in support of the alternative hypothesis, because there was a positive significant relationship found between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance.

The result is in agreement with Hoogendoorn and Van Praag (2016) that moderate impact of diversity does not impact the way the group performs in terms of the results of the business but if a majority of team members are diverse then socio-cognitive diversity will positively affect the way the group performs; the data suggested that the positive impact could be associated with diversified pool of knowledge which facilitates learning in the ethnically diverse groups. Muange (2020) made similar findings and concluded that teams consisting of members who differ in terms of their tenure know different groups of people have different technical skills and have a different perspective on the culture and history of the organization. This will provide employees with a wider range of contacts and knowledge and thus improve decision quality and individual performance.

5. CONCLUSION

With regard to socio-cognitive diversity, the study found that the relationship between socio-cognitive diversity and employee performance was positive and significant. Most respondents reported that issues of discrimination along ethnic lines in the counties had been effectively dealt with. It is observable that in today's society, many employees are looking to be employed in places where they feel appreciated and given room to grow irrespective of their ethnic or cultural background. For instance, through the socio-cognitive diversity collaborations among the employees have been increased to some level. This may be because the diverse teams provide different capabilities in carrying out various duties and thus employees have to rely on each other to accomplish the goals, daily objectives, and visions that have been set in the county governments.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that policymakers establish a diversity policy that includes a requirement that the management of county governments; establish measurable objectives for achieving greater socio-cognitive and assess annually both the measurable objectives for achieving socio-cognitive and the progress in achieving it.

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