

The Effect of Psychological Empowerment on Employee Performance in Law Courts in Kenya: A Case Study of Vihiga Law Courts

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Abstract: The study examined the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance in law courts in Kenya, with specific reference to Vihiga Law Courts. The study was grounded on Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y. A case study research design was adopted. The target population comprised 50 employees drawn from judges, magistrates, court reporters, legal secretaries, and court clerks. Inferential statistics, including linear regression analysis, were used to analyze data with the aid of SPSS version 21. The findings revealed that psychological empowerment has a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance. The results indicated that increases in psychological empowerment led to improved employee performance in law courts. The study also established that empowerment dimensions such as autonomy, competence, meaning, and impact enhance employee motivation and efficiency. The study concludes that psychological empowerment is a key determinant of employee performance in judicial institutions. It recommends that court management strengthen empowerment practices through participatory decision-making, delegation of responsibilities, staff training, and improved working conditions to enhance service delivery.

Keywords: Psychological empowerment, employee performance, Vihiga Law Courts

I. Background of the study

Employee performance is degree of accomplishment of the tasks that make up an employee job. It reflects how well an employee is fulfilling the requirements of a job (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019). Employee performance in output terms means the achievement of quantified objectives and how these objectives are achieved (Kuswati, 2020). High performance results from appropriate behavior especially discretionary and the effectiveness of skills and competencies. It is not just a matter of achieving targets but how well they are achieved. Performance in a given situation can be viewed as a resulting from the interrelationships among effort abilities and role perceptions. To attain an acceptable level of performance a minimum level of proficiency must exist in each of the performance components (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

Employee performance is critical for organizations, as it helps in increase organizational performance. Employee performance is judged against the organization's performance standards. When evaluating performance, a variety of factors can be considered, including productivity, efficiency and quality. A strong managers have a responsibility to ensure that their organizations strive for and achieve high levels of performance. For this reason, the board should find the best way of ensuring employees work is productive and efficient in an organization. Employee performance is estimated against the presentation norms set up by the law courts. When measuring employee performance, a variety of measures, such as work accomplishment rate, number of pending cases, efficiency and effectiveness, can be used (Rania & Rahmanb, 2021).

Currently, many law courts in Kenya are facing challenges of poor performance of employees. Law court judges have failed to settle disputes and enhancement of fundamental rights. Decision and verdict made in the court has also been questionable in most law courts in Kenya (Abualoush, Obeidat, & Tarhini, 2018).

To manage and improve employee's performance, managers must explore the cause of action, plans and empower workers to find solutions and use performance focused communication (Sugiarti, Finatariani, & Rahman, 2021). Improving performance is only achievable where there are effective processes of continuous development. Further, employee performance is enhanced by among other factors as job satisfaction, commitment and capability to perform. Moreover, quality of work life therefore facilitates improved performance. An organization system that continually aligns its strategy, goals, objectives and internal operations with the demand of its external environment usually maximizes its performance. Many organizations have developed standards to manage employee performance and their emphasis is on improvement, learning and devout create a high-performance workforce (Ridwan, Mulyani, & Ali, 2020).

Law courts have a continual task with the primary goal to improve the performance on both the organization and individual employee. For attainable of acceptable performance level, law court employees must possess a minimum level of expertise in every component of performance. In managing and improving employee performance, the management of law courts should empower the employees to perform their tasks (Wiredu, Otoo, & Yang, 2021). Empowerment has a larger context and it can be viewed through various extensions and perspectives. We can define empowerment as a way of delegation which enables work decisions to be taken as near as possible to the operating units and their customer. It can also be defined as a set of managerial practices aimed at increasing an employee's independence and responsibilities thereby qualifying them to do their job or tasks more effectively and efficiently (Bose & Emirates, 2018).

According to Baird and Munir (2018) empowerment is the process of sharing power with employees, thereby enhancing their confidence in their ability to perform their jobs and their belief that they are influential contributions to the Organization. Empowerment has been defined as an authority, in terms of encouraging and allowing individuals to take personal responsibility for improving the way they do their jobs and contribute to the Organizational goals (Baird & Munir, 2018).

Empowerment is a change management tool, which helps organizations create an environment where every individual can use his or her abilities and energies to satisfy the customer. It is all embracing how employees use their abilities and whether there are boundaries to responsibilities, the degree and type of power employees enjoy, power relation between employee, managers, individuals, teams and customers. Employee empowerment is a relational construct that describes how those with power in organizations share power, information, resources, and rewards with those lacking them (Murray & Holmes, 2021).

Employee empowering enables people to contribute to Organizational effectiveness as it allows all the talent knowledge to be utilized since those who are doing the job are those who know the job most and that employees cannot keep ideas to themselves on performance improvement. Therefore, empowered employees are well placed to maximize their potential and, in the process, enhance the competitive advantage of their organization. Focus on performance is an important key factor on employee empowerment (Zaraket, Garios, & Malek, 2018). Present business environment has been much oriented towards efficiency and business process re-engineering as important major emphasis on performance improvement as main way of increasing effectiveness. Therefore, quality and improving customer links is a fine approach to performance, as everyone understands what is expected of them as individually or group and in turn, Organizations knows what they can deliver (Zaraket, Garios, & Malek, 2018). For instance, the State of the Judiciary and the Administration of Justice Report for the year ended June 2021 indicated a significant increase in the number of pending court cases in Kenya, rising by 5% from 617,582 cases in June 2020 to 649,112 cases by June 2021. Of these cases, 375,671 were categorized as backlog cases, defined as matters that had remained unresolved for more than one year within the court system. The report further showed that the largest proportion of pending cases, amounting to 512,454 cases (78%), was recorded in magistrates' courts, followed by 90,901 cases at the High Court (State of the Judiciary and Administration of Justice Report, 2021). These statistics demonstrate the increasing workload and operational pressure facing judicial institutions in Kenya. The rising number of pending and backlog cases may partly reflect challenges associated with employee performance within judicial institutions. Employees operating under heavy workloads, work pressure, and demanding service expectations may experience stress, reduced motivation, and diminished effectiveness if they do not feel psychologically empowered. Psychological empowerment, through dimensions such as competence, meaning, self-determination, and impact, may enhance employees' confidence, autonomy, and commitment toward their duties. Consequently, empowered employees are likely to perform more efficiently, improve service delivery, and contribute toward reducing case backlogs and improving the overall administration of justice within law courts. Thus, examining psychological empowerment at Vihiga Law Courts is important in understanding how employee-related factors may contribute to improved performance and institutional efficiency.

1.2 Study Objective

To determine the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance in Kisumu County law courts.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

H₀₁: Psychological empowerment has no significant effect on employee performance in Kisumu County law courts.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 McGregor's X and Y Theory on Empowerment

The theory was proposed by McGregor's who stated that manager's approach affects the outcome of the worker. Employees given even a little attention, will equate that attention to 'special' treatment that is different from

the treatment that others receive. The basic understanding to boss subordinate relationships lies in the foundation that the habits of the managers hold the power to create productive or counterproductive environments. There are two sets of arguments that have been used to justify the utilization of empowerment (McGregor, 1960).

In the study context, Theory X assumes employees are less self-motivated and therefore require close supervision, strict rules, and centralized decision-making. In law courts, this may result in limited autonomy, minimal participation in decisions, and reduced initiative. Such conditions weaken psychological empowerment by reducing employees' sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, leading to lower performance and contributing to delays and case backlog. Conversely, Theory Y assumes employees are self-directed, responsible, and creative when supported. In law courts, trust, participation, and autonomy enhance psychological empowerment, improving motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. Psychological empowerment acts as the link between Theory Y practices and employee performance. When employees feel competent, autonomous, and impactful, they perform better, improving efficiency and reducing backlog. Thus, McGregor's Theory X and Y explain how management style influences empowerment and employee performance at Vihiga Law Courts, supporting improved judicial service delivery.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable

Psychological Empowerment

- Number of Mentorship programs
- Number of Recognition

Dependent Variable

Employee Performance

- Job accomplishment rate

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 Effects of Psychological Empowerment on Performance

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee performance across different sectors and countries, consistently demonstrating a positive and significant association between empowerment dimensions and employee outcomes. Rania and Rahman (2021) investigated the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance among automotive after-sales service employees in Malaysia. Guided by Self-Determination Theory, the study employed a survey design with a sample of 241 employees. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 through correlation and regression analysis. The findings revealed that all dimensions of psychological empowerment, meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, were significantly correlated with and predictive of employee performance, indicating that empowered employees tend to perform better.

Similarly, Ahmadi, Yousefianzadeh, and Taheri (2018) examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and job satisfaction among librarians in Iran University of Medical Sciences libraries. Using a cross-sectional survey design, the study found that librarians who perceived their work as meaningful and valuable reported higher levels of psychological empowerment, which significantly enhanced job satisfaction. This implies that empowerment not only improves performance but also strengthens positive work attitudes.

In another study, Chiang and Hsieh (2018) explored the effects of organizational support and psychological empowerment on job performance in Taiwan hotels. Using data from 513 employees and analyzing it through structural equation modeling, the findings indicated that psychological empowerment positively influenced job performance and organizational citizenship behavior. However, perceived organizational support alone did not significantly influence job performance, highlighting psychological empowerment as a stronger predictor of employee effectiveness.

In the Kenyan context, Amayi, Machogu, and Kanyungu (2017) evaluated the impact of employee empowerment on performance in Murang'a Law Court. Using a mixed-method approach and SPSS analysis, the study established that psychological empowerment had a positive and significant effect on employee performance in the public sector judicial setting. This confirms the relevance of empowerment in improving efficiency and service delivery within court systems.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate a consistent conclusion: psychological empowerment positively influences employee performance across diverse sectors including automotive services, healthcare libraries, hospitality, and the judiciary. The evidence suggests that employees who experience higher levels of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact tend to perform better, exhibit stronger job satisfaction, and engage more

effectively in organizational roles. These findings provide strong empirical support for examining psychological empowerment in relation to employee performance in law courts in Kenya, particularly at Vihiga Law Courts.

III. Study Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research adopted a case study research design. A research design serves as a blueprint of the research process, ensuring that the researcher addresses the research problem comprehensively. It integrates all aspects of data collection and analysis, providing a clear framework for how the study objectives will be achieved. Specifically, a case study design was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth examination of the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance within a real-life institutional setting. The design enabled the researcher to focus intensively on the unique context of Vihiga Law Courts, thereby providing detailed and contextualized insights into the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee performance (Dannels, 2018).

3.2 Target Population

A population refers to the entire set of elements that are of interest to the researcher (Weeks, 2020). In this study, the target population comprised a total of fifty (50) employees working at Vihiga Law Courts. The respondents were drawn from different categories of court staff to ensure representation of all key functional areas within the court system. These included 3 Justices/Judges, 6 Magistrates, 8 Court reporters, 15 Legal secretaries, and 18 Law/Court clerks.

3.3 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

The researcher used inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS version 21 to analyze the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee performance at Vihiga Law Courts. Inferential statistics were applied to enable generalization of the findings from the sample to the study population. In particular, linear regression analysis was used to determine the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance. Linear regression is a statistical technique used to examine the relationship between a dependent variable and an independent variable and to estimate the extent to which the independent variable predicts changes in the dependent variable. The study adopted the following simple linear regression model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1PE + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Employee Performance

β_0 = Constant

β_1 = Regression coefficient for Psychological Empowerment

PE = Psychological Empowerment

ε = Error term

The linear regression analysis enabled the researcher to establish whether psychological empowerment had a statistically significant effect on employee performance and the magnitude of this effect within the context of the study.

IV. Data Analysis and Discussion

The study employed linear regression to evaluate the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance of law courts in Kenya.

4.1 Linear Regression Analysis Results

This section presents the results of the linear regression analysis used to determine the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance at Vihiga Law Courts. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 21, and the results were used to assess the strength, direction, and significance of the relationship between the study variables. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Linear Regression Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	.661	.102	6.505	.001
	Psychological Empowerment	.375	.126	2.981	.025

4.1.1 Psychological empowerment and employee performance of law courts in Kenya

The linear regression results in Table 1 present the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee performance at Vihiga Law Courts. The findings show that psychological empowerment has a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance (B = 0.375, t = 2.981, p = 0.025), implying that

increases in psychological empowerment lead to improved employee performance within the court system. The constant term ($\beta_0 = 0.661$, $p = 0.001$) indicates that when psychological empowerment is held constant, employee performance remains at 0.661 units. This represents the baseline level of performance that may be attributed to other institutional or personal factors not captured in the model.

The positive coefficient of psychological empowerment confirms that employees who experience higher levels of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact tend to perform better in their duties. This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies. For instance, Rania and Rahman (2021) established that psychological empowerment significantly predicts employee performance among automotive service employees in Malaysia. Similarly, Chiang and Hsieh (2018) found that psychological empowerment positively influences job performance and organizational citizenship behavior in the hospitality sector. In addition, Amayi, Machogu, and Kanyungu (2017) reported that employee empowerment had a significant positive effect on performance in Kenyan judicial institutions, reinforcing the relevance of empowerment in public sector settings. These studies collectively support the current finding that psychological empowerment enhances employee performance across different organizational contexts.

The results can also be strongly explained using McGregor's theoretical framework. According to Douglas McGregor's Theory Y, employees are self-motivated, responsible, and capable of self-direction when provided with a supportive environment. The positive relationship observed in this study aligns with Theory Y, as psychological empowerment fosters autonomy, trust, and participation in decision-making. When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to take initiative, improve efficiency, and enhance service delivery.

Conversely, the findings challenge the assumptions of Theory X, which views employees as passive and requiring strict supervision. In environments where Theory X dominates, employees may experience reduced empowerment, leading to lower motivation and performance. However, the positive coefficient in this study suggests that when empowerment is enhanced, employee performance improves significantly, supporting the shift toward Theory Y-oriented management practices.

In the context of Vihiga Law Courts, these findings imply that strengthening psychological empowerment through participatory management, delegation of responsibilities, and supportive leadership can improve employee effectiveness. This is particularly important in judicial institutions where efficiency, accuracy, and timely case handling are essential for reducing backlog and improving access to justice. Overall, the regression results, supported by previous studies and McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, confirm that psychological empowerment is a key determinant of employee performance in law courts.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study concluded that psychological empowerment has a significant and positive influence on employee performance at Vihiga Law Courts. The regression results indicated that employees who experience higher levels of psychological empowerment, through meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact, demonstrate improved performance in their duties. This implies that empowerment is a critical driver of efficiency, commitment, and effectiveness in judicial service delivery. Based on the findings, it is concluded that psychological empowerment plays a central role in enhancing employee productivity in law courts. When employees are empowered, they are more motivated, more engaged in their work, and more capable of handling their responsibilities effectively, which contributes to improved service delivery and reduced inefficiencies such as delays in case handling.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the management of Vihiga Law Courts should strengthen psychological empowerment practices to enhance employee performance. This can be achieved by promoting a supportive work environment where employees feel valued, trusted, and involved in decision-making processes. Such an environment enhances employees' sense of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact, which are essential for improved performance. The judiciary should also adopt participatory management practices in line with Douglas McGregor's Theory Y. This involves delegating responsibilities appropriately, encouraging teamwork, and allowing employees to exercise initiative in executing their duties. By reducing over-centralization of decision-making, employees are likely to become more motivated and productive.

In addition, it is recommended that continuous capacity-building programs be implemented to strengthen employees' skills and competencies. Training and development initiatives will enhance employees' confidence in performing their tasks, thereby improving their effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery. The study further recommends that court management should recognize and reward employee contributions through fair performance

appraisal systems. Recognition of good performance will reinforce positive behavior, increase job satisfaction, and encourage higher levels of commitment among employees.

Finally, the judiciary should ensure that policies aimed at improving employee welfare and working conditions are fully implemented. Improved working environments will enhance psychological empowerment, reduce work-related stress, and ultimately contribute to better service delivery and reduced case backlog within the court system.

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