



EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE OF MERU COUNTY GOVERNMENT, KENYA

¹ Komen Broliene Kipyegon, ² Dr. Mose Thomas, Phd,

¹ Masters Student, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

² Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

ABSTRACT

County governments play a critical role in the decentralization of power in Kenya, which aims to promote more efficient governance and equitable distribution of resources across the country. The Meru County Government, located in Kenya, faces several significant challenges that hinder its ability to achieve sustainable development and efficient governance. These issues have created a turbulent environment for the county's leadership and overall progress. The main objective of this study is to establish the influence of employee engagement strategies on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to establish the influence of work engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya and to determine the influence of organizational engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. This study was guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Social Exchange Theory (SET). This study used descriptive research design. This study was conducted in Meru County and focused on elected leaders and departmental heads. Meru County is one of the 47 counties of Kenya located in the former Eastern Province. The county comprises of nine parliamentary constituencies and 45 electoral wards. In addition, the county has 13 departments. This study therefore targeted 142 respondents comprising of MCAs and departmental heads and their assistants. A total sample size of 105 respondents was taken with the aid of Yamane (1967) formula. This study collected quantitative data. Quantitative data was coded then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software version 22. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data in frequency distributions and percentages which were presented in tables and figures. Inferential statistics comprised of correlation analysis and regression analysis. The study results were presented through use of tables and figures. The study concludes that work engagement has a positive and significant influence on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. Further, the study concludes that organizational engagement has a positive and significant influence on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the management of County Government in Kenya should strengthen employee recognition and reward systems. By consistently acknowledging individual and team achievements, both formally and informally, the government can foster a culture of appreciation and motivation. In addition, the study recommends that the management of County Government in Kenya should promote collaborative goal-setting and decision-making. Involving teams in setting objectives and contributing to important decisions fosters a sense of ownership, unity, and shared responsibility.

Key Words: Employee Engagement Strategies, Work Engagement, Performance, Organizational Engagement

Background of the Study

County government refers to the administrative body that governs a specific geographic area within a state or country, known as a county. It is responsible for providing local services, enforcing laws, managing public resources, and maintaining infrastructure within its jurisdiction (Rajendran & Doraisamy, 2022). County government in Kenya is a decentralized form of governance established under the 2010 Constitution. It is structured to bring services closer to the people and enhance democratic participation at the local level (Githinji & Muli, 2021). The county government consists of three main arms; The County Executive is headed by the Governor, who is elected by the county's residents. The Governor is assisted by a Deputy Governor and a team of County Executive Committee (CEC) members, who are appointed and vetted to head various departments such as health, agriculture, and finance (Tawat *et al*, 2023). This arm is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the county, policy implementation, and ensuring that development plans are executed effectively. The Governor also represents the county in intergovernmental relations and plays a key leadership role in setting the county's development agenda (Muslim *et al*, 2021).

The County Assembly, also known as the County Legislature, is composed of Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) who are elected from the county wards. The Assembly's primary roles include making laws for the county, approving the budget and development plans, and providing oversight over the County Executive (Zhang & Dong, 2022). The Assembly also has the power to vet and approve appointments made by the Governor, including the CEC members. Additionally, the Assembly acts as a platform for public participation by representing the views and interests of their constituents in decision-making processes (Hochin *et al*, 2022). The County Public Service Board (CPSB) is an independent body established to manage human resources within the county government. Its main functions include establishing and abolishing offices in the county public service, appointing individuals to hold or act in public offices, and promoting values and principles of public service such as integrity, transparency, and efficiency. The CPSB ensures that the recruitment and management of county staff is done in a fair and merit-based manner, thereby enhancing professionalism and service delivery within the county (Annan *et al*, 2023).

Devolution is the process of transferring political, administrative, and fiscal powers from the central government to lower levels of government, in this case, the county governments. In Kenya, devolution was formally introduced by the 2010 Constitution as a way to promote democratic governance, enhance service delivery, and ensure equitable development across the country (Mbugua, 2021). It marked a significant shift from the previous centralized system, which was often criticized for being inefficient, unresponsive, and prone to corruption. The primary aim of devolution is to bring government services closer to the people (Ruganzi, 2022). By empowering county governments to manage their own resources and make decisions that reflect the unique needs of their local populations, devolution enhances accountability and citizen participation (Ifeyinwa *et al*, 2022). Counties are now responsible for key services such as health, agriculture, trade development, and early childhood education. This has made it easier for citizens to access services and hold their leaders accountable. Devolution also promotes equitable distribution of national resources (Kitenge, 2021). Through the equitable share of revenue allocated to counties by the national government, regions that were previously marginalized now have the opportunity to develop their infrastructure, improve livelihoods, and reduce poverty (Ssebyonga, 2021).

Employee engagement strategies are approaches organizations use to create a positive and motivating work environment that encourages employees to be committed, enthusiastic, and productive (Kilonzo, Were & Odhiambo, 2023). These strategies often focus on improving

communication, fostering a sense of belonging, and aligning employees' goals with the organization's mission. Some common methods include offering opportunities for professional growth and development, recognizing and rewarding achievements, promoting work-life balance, and providing regular feedback. Furthermore, involving employees in decision-making processes, ensuring clear career progression paths, and creating a culture of trust and respect are crucial components (Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru, 2020).

Work engagement refers to the level of enthusiasm, passion, and dedication an employee feels toward their job. Engaged employees are deeply involved in their tasks, which often leads to increased productivity, creativity, and a stronger commitment to organizational goals (Odero & Makori, 2022). Work engagement is typically influenced by factors such as job design, clear communication, opportunities for skill development, and supportive work environments. Organizational engagement refers to employees' emotional commitment to the overall success and culture of the company. When employees are engaged at an organizational level, they feel a sense of belonging and alignment with the company's mission, driving long-term loyalty and reducing turnover (Githinji & Muli, 2021). This study sought to establish the influence of employee engagement strategies on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

County governments play a critical role in the decentralization of power in Kenya, which aims to promote more efficient governance and equitable distribution of resources across the country. By being closer to the people, county governments are better positioned to address local needs, implement developmental projects, and enhance service delivery in sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, and agriculture (Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru, 2020). These local governments contribute directly to national growth by improving the livelihoods of citizens, creating employment, and fostering regional economic development. Moreover, they are instrumental in the formulation and execution of policies tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities within their geographical regions. As such, the performance and effectiveness of county governments are crucial for the overall socio-economic development of Kenya (Odero & Makori, 2022).

Meru County faces several significant challenges that hinder its ability to achieve sustainable development and efficient governance. These issues have created a turbulent environment for the county's leadership and overall progress (Githinji & Muli, 2023). The impeachment motion against Governor Kawira Mwangaza has been a recurring political challenge in Meru County. As of 2024, Mwangaza, who assumed office in 2022, has faced three impeachment motions, two of which have been tabled in 2023 and 2024. In July 2024, the Meru County Assembly voted 43 to 1 in favor of impeachment, accusing her of abuse of office and misconduct (Kilonzo, Were & Odhiambo, 2024). However, the motion was rejected by the Senate due to the lack of substantial evidence, continuing a cycle of political instability. These impeachment attempts have not only delayed governance but also undermined the effectiveness of county leadership (Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru, 2020). Political instability like this has a direct impact on development initiatives, as local leadership is unable to focus on critical issues like infrastructure or public service delivery. According to a survey conducted by the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) in 2024, political conflicts within the county assembly and between the executive and legislature have contributed to a 35% slowdown in the implementation of key development projects, including roads and healthcare facilities (Kilonzo, Were & Odhiambo, 2024).

Management inefficiencies are another major roadblock to Meru County's development. A 2023 report by the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) revealed that project costs

in Meru County had risen by an average of 14.8% due to mismanagement and inflation of project budgets (Githinji & Muli, 2023). A prominent example was the construction of a 100-bed hospital in the Imenti North sub-county, which exceeded its budget by KSh 45 million, up from KSh 250 million to KSh 295 million. Poor procurement processes, delayed decision-making, and corruption were identified as contributing factors (Odero & Makori, 2022). A study conducted by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) in 2022 found that 42% of Meru County residents reported dissatisfaction with government services, citing delayed infrastructure projects and poorly executed public services as key issues (Githinji & Muli, 2023). Moreover, the lack of proper management in the healthcare sector has led to frequent stockouts of essential medicines in county hospitals, with a 2023 health audit showing that 32% of the county's healthcare facilities had insufficient drug supplies, impacting 350,000 residents. Such inefficiencies in management have hindered the county's ability to provide timely services and maintain infrastructure projects, slowing overall development (Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru, 2020).

Financial mismanagement in Meru County has been an ongoing issue, with the Auditor General's 2024 report uncovering alarming statistics. The report found that the county had failed to account for KSh 1.04 billion in public funds, with KSh 241.85 million in expenditure being entirely unsupported by proper documentation (Kilonzo, Were & Odhiambo, 2024). In addition to this, a total of KSh 28 million was spent on consultancy fees for projects that were never fully completed or even started. In the same report, it was revealed that KSh 13.5 million allocated to refurbishing county government offices was misused, as the work done was substandard and failed to meet basic building standards (Odero & Makori, 2022). The county also faced allegations of awarding contracts worth KSh 68 million to companies that did not meet the required qualifications or standards. The Financial Management Report of 2023 by the Office of the Controller of Budget revealed that Meru County had the highest level of irregular payments among Kenyan counties, with over 25% of the total budget allocated for development being spent on non-priority activities (Githinji & Muli, 2023). These financial discrepancies, including fraudulent procurements and unsupported payments, have resulted in poor public service delivery and contributed to the widening trust gap between the county government and its residents (Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru, 2020).

Employee engagement strategies are fundamental in improving the performance of organizations, as they focus on optimizing employee motivation, commitment, and productivity. When employees are engaged, they feel valued, connected to their work, and aligned with the organization's goals, which translates to better service delivery and efficient use of resources (Kilonzo, Were & Odhiambo, 2024). Various studies have been conducted in different parts of the world on employee engagement strategies and organization performance. For instance, Githinji and Muli (2022) investigated on the employee engagement strategies and employee performance. Wafula, Mamuli and Wafula (2024) researched on the influence of employee engagement strategies on organizational performance and Waithaka, Muriithi and Kinyariro (2023) examined on employee engagement strategies and employee performance of public universities. However, none of these studies focused on work engagement, organizational engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. To fill the highlighted gaps, the current study sought to establish the influence of employee engagement strategies (work engagement, and organizational engagement) on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to establish the influence of employee engagement strategies on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya

The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- i. To establish the influence of work engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya
- ii. To determine the influence of organizational engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985), is a psychological theory that focuses on human motivation and the innate psychological needs essential for optimal development and functioning. At the core of SDT are three fundamental needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Seyed & Lai, 2023). Autonomy refers to the sense of control over one's actions and decisions, competence is the ability to effectively engage in activities, and relatedness involves forming meaningful connections with others. According to SDT, when these needs are satisfied, individuals experience higher motivation, well-being, and overall psychological health (Karangwa & Njenga, 2024).

The theory distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves engaging in activities for their inherent enjoyment or satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or pressures (Kanake, Kemboi & Tenai, 2020). SDT posits that individuals are most motivated and perform best when they are intrinsically motivated, and that external rewards can either enhance or hinder intrinsic motivation depending on how they are presented. For example, when external rewards are perceived as controlling, they may undermine intrinsic motivation; conversely, when rewards are perceived as informational or supportive, they can enhance motivation (Njoroge, Bula & Wanyoike, 2022).

Moreover, SDT emphasizes the importance of the social environment in supporting or thwarting the fulfillment of the basic psychological needs. Environments that offer autonomy support, acknowledge competence, and foster meaningful relationships are more likely to lead to increased intrinsic motivation, while environments that are controlling or fail to meet these needs may lead to diminished motivation and well-being (Juma, Moguche & Kanyiri, 2022). This perspective has broad applications in education, healthcare, sports, and organizational settings, providing a framework for understanding how different factors influence motivation and well-being (Karangwa & Njenga, 2024). The theory was used to establish the influence of work engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by sociologists George Homans (1958), is based on the idea that human relationships are formed and maintained through a cost-benefit analysis. Individuals engage in social interactions with the expectation of gaining rewards and avoiding costs (Aditya, Dian & Astri, 2022). These rewards can be tangible (such as money or resources) or intangible (such as affection, approval, or respect), while costs may include time, effort, or emotional strain. SET proposes that people are motivated to maximize rewards and minimize costs, and the balance between these factors determines the nature and stability of relationships (Rugengamanzi & Irechukwu, 2023).

One of the central concepts in SET is the "comparison level" (CL), which refers to the expectations individuals have for the outcomes of their relationships based on past experiences or societal norms. If the rewards in a relationship exceed the individual's comparison level, the relationship is likely to be viewed as satisfying and stable (Mudachi, 2020). On the other hand, if the costs outweigh the rewards, the relationship may be seen as unsatisfactory and may lead to termination or conflict. SET also introduces the idea of "comparison level for alternatives" (CLalt), which refers to the evaluation of potential alternative relationships or situations. If individuals perceive better alternatives, they may be less committed to their current relationships (Gulali, Obura & Mise, 2021).

Social Exchange Theory is particularly relevant in understanding interpersonal relationships, organizational behavior, and economic transactions. It has been applied to explain decision-making processes in various social contexts, including romantic relationships, workplace dynamics, and business negotiations (Cheche, 2020). By analyzing the costs and rewards associated with relationships, SET provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of social interactions and the factors that influence the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of relationships (Mudachi, 2020). The theory was used to determine the influence of organizational engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is an abstract representation connected to the researcher's study objectives that directs the collection and analysis of data (Creswell, 2019). For this study, the conceptual framework encompasses independent variables (work engagement, organizational engagement) and dependent variable (performance of Meru County Government, Kenya) as illustrated below in Figure 2.1

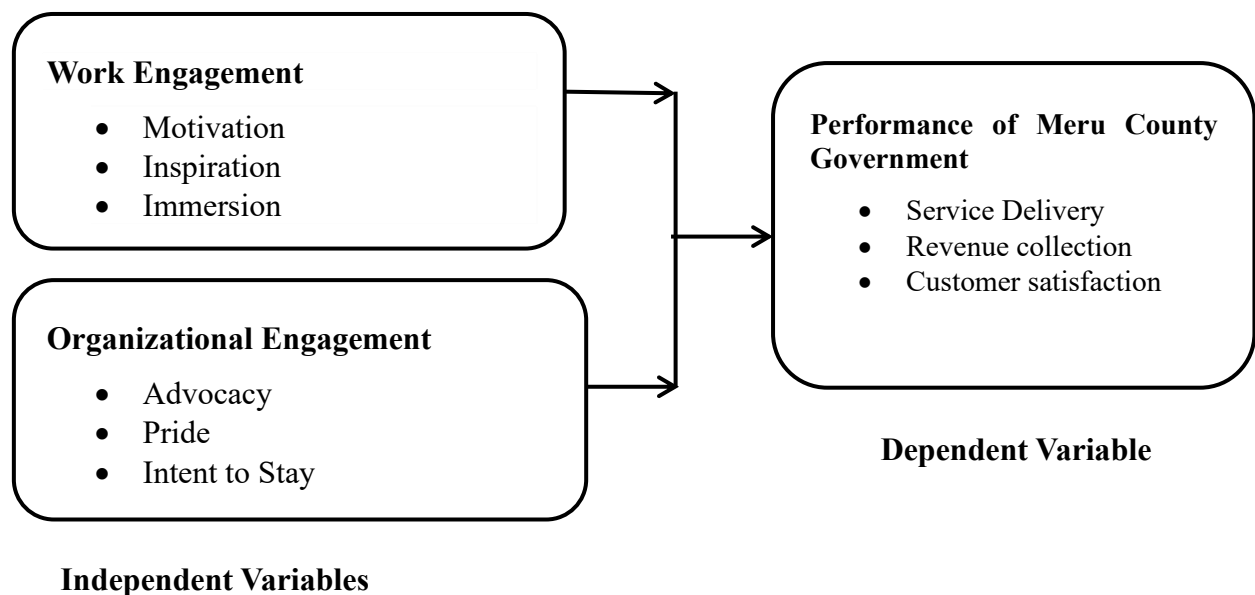


Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework

Work Engagement

Work engagement refers to the level of enthusiasm, commitment, and energy that employees bring to their roles. It is characterized by a strong emotional investment in one's work, where individuals are fully absorbed in their tasks and motivated to contribute to the organization's success (Seyed & Lai, 2023). Engaged employees are passionate about their work, feel a sense of purpose, and take pride in achieving goals. They exhibit high levels of dedication, resilience,

and a proactive attitude, often going beyond basic expectations. Work engagement leads to improved performance, job satisfaction, and well-being, and is positively correlated with lower turnover rates and higher productivity. Ultimately, when employees are engaged in their work, they create a positive work environment that benefits both them and the organization as a whole (Karangwa & Njenga, 2024).

Motivation is the driving force that pushes individuals to achieve their goals and pursue their ambitions. It is the internal spark that propels us to take action, especially when faced with challenges or setbacks. Motivation can come from both intrinsic and extrinsic sources. Intrinsic motivation arises from within, driven by a deep sense of purpose, personal fulfillment, or passion for an activity (Kanake, Kemboi & Tenai, 2020). For instance, an artist may create because they enjoy the process of painting and expressing their emotions. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation comes from external factors like rewards, recognition, or the desire to meet societal expectations. While motivation can fluctuate, the key to sustained success is often rooted in finding a balance between both types. Understanding one's own motivations can help in setting clear, achievable goals, and staying on track even when faced with adversity (Njoroge, Bula & Wanyoike, 2022).

Inspiration is the spark that ignites creativity, and it often serves as the catalyst for motivation. Unlike motivation, which is more about persistence and goal-directed behavior, inspiration is a momentary feeling that can alter one's perspective or approach to a task. Inspiration can come from many sources: nature, art, conversations, or even life experiences (Juma, Moguche & Kanyiri, 2022). It's what makes someone feel excited, awakened, or ready to take on a challenge. For example, reading a powerful quote might inspire someone to write a novel, or watching a motivational speaker might inspire an individual to change their career path. The beauty of inspiration is that it often arrives unexpectedly and can lead to moments of profound insight or change. It feeds our creativity and opens up new possibilities, often helping us see the world with fresh eyes (Karangwa & Njenga, 2024).

Immersion refers to the deep involvement and engagement in an activity or experience, where individuals become fully absorbed in what they are doing. When people are immersed, they often lose track of time and become so focused on the task at hand that they forget about distractions and external concerns (Seyed & Lai, 2023). This state of being fully present is often associated with "flow," a term coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, where people experience heightened enjoyment and productivity. Immersion can occur in many areas of life, whether it's through art, sports, learning, or work (Karangwa & Njenga, 2024). For example, a writer might experience immersion when they lose themselves in the process of storytelling, or a musician might feel completely absorbed while composing a piece of music. This state of immersion enhances performance, encourages creativity, and fosters a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, making it an essential part of any productive or fulfilling endeavor (Kanake, Kemboi & Tenai, 2020).

Organizational Engagement

Organizational engagement refers to the emotional commitment and connection that employees have to the organization they work for. It encompasses a sense of ownership, pride, and involvement, which drives employees to work harder, support the company's goals, and contribute to its success (Aditya, Dian & Astri, 2022). When employees are engaged with their organization, they go beyond fulfilling their job requirements; they actively support and champion the organization's values, mission, and culture. Organizational engagement is often seen as a critical factor in fostering productivity, loyalty, and a positive work environment (Rugengamanzi & Irechukwu, 2023).

Advocacy is one of the key components of organizational engagement. When employees are engaged, they tend to become strong advocates for the organization. They speak positively

about the company, both within and outside of work, and are eager to recommend it as a great place to work (Mudachi, 2020). Advocacy often reflects an employee's belief in the organization's mission and values. Engaged employees feel a sense of responsibility to represent the organization in a favorable light because they are personally invested in its success. This type of support can enhance the organization's reputation, attract top talent, and foster positive relationships with customers, clients, and the public (Gulali, Obura & Mise, 2021).

Pride is another crucial element of organizational engagement. Employees who feel proud of their organization are more likely to put in discretionary effort and go above and beyond their regular duties. Pride stems from a strong sense of identification with the organization, its accomplishments, and its contributions to the industry or society at large (Cheche, 2020). When employees feel proud of their workplace, they are more motivated, loyal, and productive. This pride can also boost morale across the team, as employees encourage each other and collectively work toward the organization's success. Pride can be cultivated through recognition, alignment with personal values, and the organization's positive impact on the community or the world.

Intent to stay is the final key factor in organizational engagement. It refers to the likelihood that an employee will remain with the organization for the long term (Mudachi, 2020). Engaged employees have a strong intent to stay because they are emotionally and professionally invested in the organization (Aditya, Dian & Astri, 2022). They feel a sense of fulfillment, purpose, and growth within their role, which encourages them to stay committed to their work and the organization's future. A high intent to stay reduces turnover rates, saving the organization time and resources in recruitment and training. It also fosters stability within the team, which is crucial for long-term success. When employees are engaged and have a strong intent to stay, they are more likely to develop deep knowledge of the organization's operations and contribute to its strategic goals (Rugengamanzi & Irechukwu, 2023).

Empirical Review

Work Engagement and Organization Performance

Seyed and Lai (2023) examined the impact of talent management and work engagement on organisational performance in Malaysia. An online survey was distributed among managers of the first ten global multinational corporations listed by Fortune magazine 2013 and 498 responses were collected. The respondents were selected through LinkedIn using stratified sampling. PLS-SEM was used to test the hypothesised relationships of the model. The result shows a positive relationship between MD Index and organisational performance, strategic HR and organisational performance, and work engagement and organisational performance. Utilising PLS path modelling to evaluate structural model including higher order component (MD Index) is highly original. The study concluded that effective application of work engagement lead to a subsequent change in organization performance.

Karangwa and Njenga (2024) assessed the effect of work engagement on the performance of microfinance banks: A case of AB Bank Rwanda Plc. A combination of descriptive and correlational research designs was employed to determine the effect size of these objectives. The study targeted a population of 257 individuals, with a sample size of 157 respondents calculated using the Yamane formula, selected through simple random and purposive sampling methods. Data was collected using questionnaires and documentation. The findings reveal valuable insights not only for AB Bank Rwanda Plc but also for the broader microfinance sector in Rwanda. The study showed that staff recognized the positive effects of internal communication, indicating a strong association between e-tendering and the bank's organizational performance. Additionally, there was a substantial positive link between leadership and organizational performance. The study confirms the positive relationships

between internal communication, leadership, employee well-being, and training and development as critical factors contributing to the performance of AB Bank Rwanda Plc. The study concluded that work engagement has a positive influence on organization performance.

Kanake, Kemboi and Tenai (2020) examined the effect of work engagement on the relationship between leader-member exchange and innovative work behaviour in Kenya. The study was based on a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected using self-administered, closed-ended questionnaire using stratified and systematic sampling techniques from a sample size of 470 respondents from a population of 9915 employees drawn from manufacturing firms in Kenya. The findings revealed that leader-member exchange has positive statistical significant effect on employee engagement, which in turn has a positive significant effect on Innovative Work Behaviour. The findings further showed a partial mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange and Innovative Work Behaviour. The study concluded that s that employees with a higher level of work engagement intended to participate in coming up with new ideas within an organisation.

Njoroge, Bula and Wanyoike (2022) assessed work engagement and employees' performance: assessing the linkage and leverage in classified hospitality firms in Kenya. Using purposive and stratified random sampling, a sample of 225 respondents was selected from 75 classified hospitality firms in Kenya. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The results showed that work engagement constructs of physical engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement were positively correlated with employees' performance. The study revealed that physical engagement influenced the quality and quantity of employees' output, emotional engagement influenced employees' citizenship behaviour, and cognitive engagement had higher influence on employees' efficiency in performance. The study established that work engagement is connected to employees' motivation factors and is impacted by contextual factors. The study concluded that work arrangement and job autonomy are crucial in improving employee's devotion and commitment in his role.

Juma, Moguche and Kanyiri (2022) researched on the effect of work engagement on the operational efficiency of water service providers in Meru County, Kenya. The Research was conducted on two water service providers: Imetha Water and Sanitation Company Limited and; Meru Water and Sewerage Services. The target population was 200 employees involving the corporate management team, middle management, and operative employees. The researcher selected 132 sample respondents from the population for the study. The researcher adopted an expository research design approach. Data was gathered using questionnaires. The results indicated that employee engagement had a significant effect on operation efficiency of water service providers in Meru County. The study concluded that the WSPs adopt work engagement strategies to improve their operational efficiency for sustainability purposes.

Organizational Engagement and Organization Performance

Aditya, Dian and Astri (2022) researched on the influence of organizational engagement and employee engagement on employees performance at Telkom University, Indonesia. The population in this study was 1247 permanent employees at Telkom University, obtained based on data from the Telkom University HR Directorate as of August 2020, the sampling technique used was Proportional Stratified Random Sampling by taking representatives from the Faculties and Directorates. The data collection technique uses a questionnaire that has been tested for validity and reliability, while the data analysis technique uses multiple regression analysis. The results of this study indicate that the organizational engagement at Telkom University is in the Strong category, Employee Engagement is in the High category, and the employee's performance is above the target. The study concluded that organizational

engagement and employee engagement have a positive and significant effect on the performance of Telkom University employees, either partially or simultaneously.

Rugengamanzi and Irechukwu (2023) assessed influence of organizational engagement on organizational Performance in Rwanda. This descriptive assessed the influence of work culture on organizational performance, data collected were cross-sectional. The total population was 302 and the sample size was 177 calculated using Yamane formula. Both stratified and purposive sampling techniques were employed. The findings showed that there is positive relationship between ethics, technology and M&E driven work culture with organizational performance. However, technology driven work culture and monitoring and evaluation driven work culture have a strong relationship with organizational performance compared to ethics driven work culture. The study concludes that ethics-driven work culture, technology-driven work culture, and M&E-driven work culture influence organizational performance in terms of achieving organizational goals and objectives, improving service delivery, improving labor productivity and improving organizational goodwill.

Mudachi (2020) examined organizational engagement practices and organization performance of African economic research consortium in Kenya. The research used case study research design. Target population comprised of 455 employees who work at African Economic Research Consortium. A sample size of 138 was selected using stratified random sample. Self-administered questionnaires delivered over email were used to gather data. The findings revealed a strong and positive correlation between organizational culture and performance. Additional findings demonstrate a positive and significant relationship between career development and firm performance. Additionally, there is a positive and significant relationship between communication and organizational performance. This study concluded that to improve organizational performance, organizational culture must support and be in accordance with the planned strategy and performance of employees' daily activities. The study concluded that if managers and senior executives are good communicators, they can expect to bring out the best in each individual and improve performance.

Gulali, Obura and Mise (2021) examined the effect of organizational engagement on organization performance on Public Universities in Kenya. Guided by Contingency Theory of organization structure, a correlation research design and a population of 215 management personal were used from 11 public universities in Kenya certified by Kenya Bureau of Standards. The study adopted a census survey. The study indicates that there was a strong positive significant correlation between organizational culture and organizational performance. Regression analyses revealed that organizational values had the strongest unique contribution to the organizational performance. The study concluded that organizational engagement had a unique significant contribution on organizational performance.

Cheche (2020) assessed organizational engagement and performance of research and training state corporations in Kenya. Descriptive and explanatory research designs were used to describe the variables and establish the nature of the relationships among them. The target population of the study was nine research and training state corporations in Kenya which had a total of 5728 employees. A census of the corporations was carried out supported by a multi stage sampling strategy to select participants which resulted in a sample of 378 respondents. The result indicates that traits, psychological state and behavioural engagements significantly influence performance of research and training state corporations in Kenya. The influence of organizational engagement on performance was found to be moderated by demographic characteristics of age, tenure and level of education while the relationship was found to be partially mediated by organisational commitment. The study concluded that employers should take in to account personality traits while hiring and assigning responsibilities to employees.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive research design which involved gathering of data that describes events then organizing, tabulating depicting and describing the data. The choice of this research design is influenced by the fact that it enables the researcher to assess the situation in the study area at the time of study. This study was conducted in Meru County and focused on elected leaders and departmental heads. Meru County is one of the 47 counties of Kenya located in the former Eastern Province. The county comprises of nine parliamentary constituencies and 45 electoral wards. In addition, the county has 13 departments comprising of Governor's Office, County Public Service Board, Department Of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Department of Education, Technology, Gender & Social Development, Department of Finance, Economic Planning & ICT, Department of Health Services, Department of Land, Physical Planning, Urban Development & Public Works, Department Of Legal Affairs. Public Service Management And Administration, Department of Roads, Transport and Energy, Department of Trade, Tourism and Cooperatives, Department of Water, Irrigation, Environment and Climate Change, Department of Youth Affairs, Social Development and Sports. This study therefore targeted 142 respondents comprising of MCAs and departmental heads and their assistants.

A sample is smaller subset of a population that adequately represents the entire group Saunders et al., (2019). A total sample size of 105 respondents was taken with the aid of Yamane (1967) formula. The study used stratified random sampling technique in choosing the sample size targeted respondents. According to Woods, (2019) stratified random sampling is a technique of probability sampling that divides the entire population into strata based on the elements characteristics. Mugenda and Mugenda, (2019) noted that the target population is divided into homogeneous strata that enable the researcher to choose the most relevant strata geared toward the research objectives. This research used a questionnaire to collect primary data. According to Patton *et. al* (2018), a questionnaire is appropriate in gathering data and measuring it against a particular point of view. Quantitative data was coded then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software version 22. The choice of the software is influenced by its ability to appropriately create graphical presentation of questions, data reporting, presentation and publishing. SPSS is also able to handle large amount of data and it is purposefully designed for social; sciences. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data in frequency distributions and percentages which were presented in tables and figures. The study also adopted multiple regression analysis to test the relationships between the variables.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher distributed 105 questionnaires to the respondents during data collection process and 91 were fully filled and returned to the researcher thus making a response rate of 86.7%. Kothari (2019) argues that a response rate which is more than 50% is considered adequate while excellent response rate is usually above 70%. According to Baruch and Holtom (2019), higher response rates lead to more accurate estimates, as they reduce the risk of non-response bias.

Descriptive statistics

Work Engagement and Performance of County Governments

The first specific objective of the study was to establish the influence of work engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on statements relating to work engagement and performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 1.

From the results, the respondents agreed that there is a strong passion for achieving the goals set by the organization ($M=3.913$, $SD= 0.688$). In addition, the respondents agreed that opportunities to improve skills and performance are actively sought ($M=3.865$, $SD= 0.845$).

Further, the respondents agreed that leadership within the organization provides inspiration to contribute positively to the team ($M=3.827$, $SD= 0.795$).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the vision and goals of the organization generate a sense of energy and enthusiasm ($M=3.822$, $SD= 0.620$). In addition, the respondents agreed that strong focus and engagement are experienced when performing work-related duties ($M=3.745$, $SD= 0.815$). Further, the respondents agreed that a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment is felt when immersed in work ($M=3.731$, $SD=0.616$).

Table 1: Work Engagement and Performance of County Governments

	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a strong passion for achieving the goals set by the organization.	3.913	0.688
Opportunities to improve skills and performance are actively sought.	3.865	0.845
Leadership within the organization provides inspiration to contribute positively to the team.	3.827	0.795
The vision and goals of the organization generate a sense of energy and enthusiasm.	3.822	0.620
Strong focus and engagement are experienced when performing work-related duties.	3.745	0.815
A sense of satisfaction and fulfillment is felt when immersed in work.	3.731	0.616
Aggregate	3.817	0.730

Organizational Engagement and Performance of County Governments

The second specific objective of the study was to determine the influence of organizational engagement on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to organizational engagement and performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 2.

From the results, the respondents agreed that there is a strong sense of pride in speaking positively about the organization to others ($M=3.887$, $SD= 0.737$). In addition, the respondents agreed that employees believe in the organization's mission and values and advocate for them ($M=3.841$, $SD= 0.856$). Further, the respondents agreed that employees take pride in the work they do for the organization ($M=3.830$, $SD= 0.846$).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the organization's reputation in the industry instills pride in its employees ($M=3.811$, $SD= 0.893$). In addition, the respondents agreed that employees are committed to long-term careers with the organization ($M=3.761$, $SD= 0.765$). Further, the respondents agreed that the organization provides the opportunities and environment for long-term growth and development ($M=3.725$, $SD=0.616$).

Table 2: Organizational Engagement and Performance of County Governments

	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a strong sense of pride in speaking positively about the organization to others.	3.887	0.737
Employees believe in the organization's mission and values and advocate for them.	3.841	0.856
Employees take pride in the work they do for the organization.	3.830	0.846
The organization's reputation in the industry instills pride in its employees.	3.811	0.893
Employees are committed to long-term careers with the organization.	3.761	0.765
The organization provides the opportunities and environment for long-term growth and development.	3.725	0.616
Aggregate	3.809	0.786

Performance of County Governments

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 3.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the county government has sufficient infrastructure to support the delivery of services ($M=3.891$, $SD=0.834$). In addition, the respondents agreed that the county government responds promptly to complaints and requests for services ($M=3.873$, $SD=0.737$). Further, the respondents agreed that the county government has efficient mechanisms in place for collecting revenue ($M=3.732$, $SD=0.736$).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the revenue collection process is transparent and accountable ($M=3.676$, $SD=0.637$). In addition, the respondents agreed that the county government's customer service representatives are responsive and helpful ($M=3.654$, $SD=0.636$). Further, the respondents agreed that the county government actively seeks feedback from residents to improve service delivery ($M=3.639$, $SD=0.846$).

Table 3: Performance of County Governments

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The county government has sufficient infrastructure to support the delivery of services.	3.891	0.834
The county government responds promptly to complaints and requests for services.	3.873	0.737
The county government has efficient mechanisms in place for collecting revenue.	3.732	0.736
The revenue collection process is transparent and accountable.	3.676	0.637
The county government's customer service representatives are responsive and helpful.	3.654	0.636
The county government actively seeks feedback from residents to improve service delivery.	3.639	0.846
Aggregate	3.744	0.738

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics in the current study focused on correlation and regression analysis. Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationship while regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between dependent variable (performance of

Meru County Government, Kenya) and independent variables (work engagement, organizational engagement).

Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between independent variables (work engagement, organizational engagement) and the dependent variable (performance of Meru County Government, Kenya). Pearson correlation coefficient range between zero and one, where by the strength of association increase with increase in the value of the correlation coefficients.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficients

		Performance of County Governments	Work Engagement	Organizational Engagement
Performance County Governments	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	91		
Work Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.875**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		
	N	91	91	
Organizational Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.887**	.341	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.056	
	N	91	91	91

From the results, there was a very strong relationship between work engagement and performance of Meru County Government, Kenya ($r = 0.875$, p value $= 0.001$). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.001 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the findings of Seyed and Lai (2023) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between work engagement and performance of county governments.

Further, the results revealed that there is a very strong relationship between organizational engagement and performance of Meru County Government, Kenya ($r = 0.887$, p value $= 0.000$). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the findings of Rugengamanzi and Irechukwu (2023) that there is a very strong relationship between organizational engagement and performance of county governments.

Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent variables (work engagement, organizational engagement) and the dependent variable (performance of Meru County Government, Kenya)

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.262	0.068		3.853	0.000
	work engagement	0.375	0.098	0.374	3.827	0.001
	organizational engagement	0.384	0.099	0.383	3.879	0.000

a Dependent Variable: performance of Meru County Government, Kenya

The regression model was as follows:

$$Y = 0.262 + 0.375X_1 + 0.384X_2$$

According to the results, work engagement has a significant effect on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya ($\beta_1=0.375$, p value= 0.001). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.001 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the findings of Seyed and Lai (2023) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between work engagement and performance of county governments.

Furthermore, the results revealed that organizational engagement has significant effect on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya ($\beta_1=0.384$, p value= 0.000). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.000 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the findings of Rugengamanzi and Irechukwu (2023) that there is a very strong relationship between organizational engagement and performance of county governments.

Conclusions

The study concludes that work engagement has a positive and significant influence on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. Findings revealed that motivation, inspiration and immersion influence performance of Meru County Government, Kenya.

Further, the study concludes that organizational engagement has a positive and significant influence on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya. Findings revealed that advocacy, pride and intent to stay influence performance of Meru County Government, Kenya.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the management of County Government in Kenya should strengthen employee recognition and reward systems. By consistently acknowledging individual and team achievements, both formally and informally, the government can foster a culture of appreciation and motivation.

Further, the study recommends that the management of County Government in Kenya should strengthen internal communication channels and transparency. Establishing clear, consistent, and open communication between leadership and staff fosters a sense of trust, alignment, and shared purpose across all departments

Suggestions for Further Studies

This study was limited to the influence of employee engagement strategies on performance of Meru County Government, Kenya hence the study findings cannot be generalized to organization performance in other organizations in Kenya. The study therefore suggests further studies on the influence of employee engagement strategies and organization performance in other organizations in Kenya.

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