
**Performance Management Practice and Employee Commitment in Selected
County Governments in Kenya**

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Abstract:

Purpose: The main purpose of the study was to determine the effect of performance management practice on employee commitment in selected county governments in Kenya. The study was anchored on Goal Setting Theory.

Material/methods: The study adopted explanatory research design. Proportionate sampling was used to select five county governments out of the forty-seven county governments in Kenya. From a target population of 12,990 employees, a sample size of 384 respondents was selected through stratified sampling. A pilot test was conducted to minimize instrumentation errors, identify weaknesses in the research design, enhance the reliability of data collection, and assess the internal consistency of the data collection instrument.

Findings: Regression analysis showed that performance management practice had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee commitment in the selected county governments in Kenya.

Conclusion: The study concluded that performance management practice is vital in enhancing employee commitment in selected county governments in Kenya. Therefore, county governments should strengthen performance management systems by involving employees in setting objectives, carrying out regular evaluations, and making fair decisions based on individual performance.

Value: The study adds value to public sector human resource management by showing that effective performance management practices can improve employee commitment in county governments. The study also provides practical insights for county government management on the need to establish proper mechanisms for recognizing good performance in the workplace.

Keywords: Performance management, employee commitment, county governments

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1. Introduction

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Globally, performance management has evolved into a critical tool for enhancing employee commitment, particularly in the public sector where efficiency and accountability are often under scrutiny. As governments aim to optimize public service delivery, the alignment of performance management practices with employee commitment has become central to achieving institutional goals (Armstrong, 2019). Employee commitment, defined as the psychological attachment and loyalty an employee has towards their organization, plays a pivotal role in driving productivity, reducing turnover, and fostering organizational citizenship behavior (Ahmad et al., 2020). Despite its importance, global studies indicate that employee commitment levels remain alarmingly low—only 15% of the global workforce is fully engaged at work (Wang & Wang, 2022). Poor performance management systems have been cited as one of the primary reasons for this disengagement, particularly when such systems are viewed as punitive or unclear.

In advanced economies such as the United States and across Europe, the public sector has struggled with employee disengagement attributed to ineffective performance appraisal systems, lack of timely feedback, and minimal linkage between individual contributions and organizational objectives (Office of Personnel Management, 2022). Countries like the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have attempted to address this by institutionalizing performance-based evaluation and feedback mechanisms, but success has been uneven due to resistance to change and bureaucratic inertia. Research indicates that when performance management systems emphasize continuous feedback, goal clarity, and recognition, they contribute significantly to employee commitment and morale (Makhulo & Mboya, 2024). Conversely, traditional performance management systems that rely solely on annual reviews or are perceived as subjective often result in demotivation and attrition (Chepngetich & Kwasira, 2022).

In the African context, public institutions, including devolved governments, have increasingly adopted performance management systems as part of public sector reforms. However, employee commitment in many of these settings remains low, often due to misaligned objectives, lack of timely feedback, and inadequate use of performance data in decision-making (Kamila, 2022; Ingebedion, 2022). Studies from countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Uganda show that even where performance systems exist, their impact on employee commitment has been minimal due to poor implementation frameworks and limited buy-in from staff (Bizunesh et al., 2023). This has led to rising concerns over service delivery, accountability, and the overall effectiveness of devolved institutions in meeting development targets.

In Kenya, county governments were established to bring services closer to the people and enhance development at the grassroots level. However, a growing body of evidence suggests that weak performance management systems have undermined employee commitment in these devolved units (Auditor General, 2022). Despite the introduction of modern tools such as the Balanced Scorecard, 360-degree feedback, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), most county governments continue to experience high turnover, declining productivity, and unmet development goals (Mwema, Were, & Ndeto, 2022). The Council of Governors (2024) reported that over 50% of county government employees are either disengaged or not fully committed to their roles. This lack of commitment has been attributed in part to ineffective performance appraisal mechanisms, inadequate feedback, and the perception that performance management is used more for administrative compliance than employee development.

Moreover, while performance management is intended to align individual efforts with organizational goals, in many county governments, it remains a disconnected process lacking in strategic intent and employee involvement (Awino & Korir, 2020). Poorly implemented performance review processes often result in demotivation, as employees are either unaware of their performance expectations or feel that evaluations are arbitrary and politically influenced. This disconnect undermines accountability and weakens the culture of performance-based management, ultimately eroding employee commitment to public service values and county development goals.

Given the centrality of employee commitment to successful service delivery and the pivotal role that performance management plays in shaping that commitment, it is imperative to understand how performance management practices influence employee attitudes and engagement in the public sector. In light of persistent challenges across Kenya's counties, this study seeks to examine the effect of performance management practices on employee commitment in selected county governments. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective performance management systems that foster a committed and results-driven public workforce. Thus, the study hypothesized that:

H₀₁: Performance management practice has no significant effect on employee commitment in selected county government in Kenya.

1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The Goal-Setting Theory, developed by Edwin Locke in 1968, emphasizes creating specific, challenging, and attainable goals to improve performance. Locke and Latham (2020) argue that ambitious goals, particularly those set at the 90th percentile of performance, lead to better outcomes as long as individuals accept the goals, have the necessary abilities, and face no conflicting objectives. The theory underscores a positive linear relationship between goal difficulty and performance, provided that individuals are committed to their targets. In this regard, goals should follow the SMART criteria specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound ensuring clarity and focus in performance expectations.

Research supports the theory's emphasis on goal commitment, self-efficacy, and alignment with organizational vision and mission. Epton (2017) and Doerr (2018) highlight that attaching rewards to goal achievement and setting both attainable and challenging objectives enhances performance. Welsh et al. (2020) note that high self-efficacy strengthens commitment to challenging tasks, while low self-efficacy reduces persistence. Regular performance evaluation, continuous feedback, and corrective action where necessary further reinforce commitment. Organizational goals, therefore, cascade from vision to departmental and individual objectives, ensuring that employee targets contribute to the wider mission.

Despite its wide application, the theory has faced criticism. Some scholars argue that individual goals may conflict with overall organizational strategy, and that complex, demanding goals often require rare skills not possessed by all employees (Bruhn et al., 2017). Additionally, there is limited empirical evidence linking goal setting to improved job satisfaction, raising questions about its impact on long-term commitment. In the context of this study, goal-setting theory provides a framework for aligning

performance appraisal systems, which enhanced job performance and efficiency (Chebet et al., 2021).

Research in public institutions, such as the State Department of Labor and the National Hospital Insurance Fund, confirms that goal setting, performance planning, performance reviews, and feedback positively correlate with employee productivity and performance (Ogolla & Oluoch, 2019; Moraa & Datche, 2019). However, these studies also noted that lack of agreement on objectives at the start of the performance period limited employees' full commitment. Overall, evidence suggests that while performance management practices significantly influence employee commitment, their effectiveness depends on fairness, consistency, and alignment with employees' career development and organizational objectives.

A review of existing literature revealed contextual, conceptual, and methodological gaps that the current study sought to address. While several studies have examined performance management and employee commitment in various contexts such as in manufacturing firms (Awino & Korir, 2021), the banking sector (Otieno & Nyakwara, 2024), and religious organizations (Jepkorir & Nchanga, 2022) there is limited evidence from county governments in Kenya, whose operational structures and service delivery demands differ significantly from those in the private sector. Conceptually, most studies have analyzed performance management as a general HRM component, without isolating its specific practices such as goal setting, feedback, and appraisal utilization in explaining employee commitment. Methodologically, many studies have relied solely on quantitative designs, which identify relationships but fail to explore the underlying reasons behind them. This study addressed these gaps by focusing exclusively on performance management practices within selected county governments in Kenya and adopting a mixed-methods approach to provide both statistical evidence and deeper explanatory insights.

3. Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory research design to examine the cause-and-effect relationship between performance management and employee commitment in county governments. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to test hypothesized relationships and explain how performance management practices influence employee commitment. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires containing closed-ended Likert-scale items and analyzed using inferential statistical techniques such as correlation and regression analysis. The explanatory design was preferred because it not only described the study variables but also explained their relationships and predicted outcomes, thereby enhancing the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings. This approach enabled the study to generate objective and evidence-based conclusions relevant to policy and management decisions within county governments in Kenya.

3.1. Sampling

The study targeted a population of 12,990 employees drawn from five selected county governments (Elgeyo Marakwet, Baringo, Trans Nzoia, West Pokot, and Bungoma) comprising middle-level managers, supervisors, and operative staff. The study was motivated by declining employee commitment within county governments, evidenced by a 25% turnover rate among top talent, which contributed to delays in development project completion and failure to achieve nearly half of planned goals. Using Cochran's

formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a sample size of 384 respondents was determined and proportionately allocated across the counties and employee categories. The study employed a combination of stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques to ensure fair representation of all employee groups and enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

The study employed both primary which was obtained through open and closed ended questionnaires. The questionnaire, structured in sections covering demographic details, performance management and employee commitment, used a Likert scale for quantitative data and open-ended items for qualitative insights. Data collection followed formal procedures, including permits from NACOSTI and consent from participants, with a drop-and-pick method supported by five research assistants. A pilot study with 38 respondents (10% of the sample) tested the instrument's validity and reliability; content validity was confirmed by expert review, while factor analysis using KMO and Bartlett's tests ensured sampling adequacy and suitability. Reliability was assessed via test-retest, inter-rater methods, and Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients ≥ 0.70 considered acceptable, ensuring the final tool was both valid and reliable for measuring performance management practice and employee commitment in the selected county governments.

3.3. Data Analysis and Model Specification

The study applied a comprehensive data analysis process, integrating both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to derive meaningful insights from the collected data. Quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaires were analyzed using measures of central tendency, variability, and distribution patterns, with results presented through tables, graphs, percentages, and means using SPSS version 20. Inferential analysis involved diagnostic tests, Pearson's correlation to examine the strength and direction of relationships, and regression analysis to predict employee commitment from performance Management Practice. Hypotheses were tested using t-tests and p-values at a 0.05 significance level, with ANOVA and F-tests used to assess model fit. Variable measurement employed Likert scale ratings (1–5) for independent, dependent, and moderating variables, with specific indicators guiding each construct. Diagnostic tests including linearity, heteroscedasticity, normality, multicollinearity, and autocorrelation were conducted to ensure compliance with regression assumptions and improve result reliability. For the hypothesis, the model took the following form;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + e$$

Where;

Y = Employee Commitment, X_1 = Performance Management Practice, β_0 = Constant term

ϵ = Error term, β_1 = Coefficients of the Regression

4. Findings and Discussion

The study achieved a high response rate, with 341 out of the targeted 384 respondents completing the questionnaire, representing 88.8% participation. This exceeded the "very good" benchmark of 70% suggested by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), and can be attributed to the researcher's active engagement and follow-up during data collection. A high response rate enhances the reliability and validity of findings, as it minimizes the risk of non-response bias.

4.1. Employee Characteristics

To provide a clearer understanding of the study participants, demographic data were collected on gender, education level, and years of service. These characteristics are important for interpreting the study results, as they help contextualize how respondents' backgrounds may influence their views and experiences related to employee commitment. Table 1 results indicated that the majority of respondents were male (58.1%) while females accounted for 41.9% demonstrating adequate gender representation in the study. In terms of education, the workforce was highly educated, with 88.5% of respondents possessing college, university, or postgraduate qualifications, suggesting that they were well-positioned to provide informed opinions on performance management and employee commitment. Regarding years of service, most respondents had worked in their respective county governments for between 4 and 8 years (71.6%) indicating substantial organizational experience and familiarity with workplace practices. Overall, the demographic profile reflects a knowledgeable and experienced respondent base, thereby enhancing the reliability and credibility of the study findings.

Table 1: Employee Characteristics

Variable		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	198	58.1
	Female	143	41.9
Education Level	Secondary	39	11.4
	College	127	37.2
	University	127	37.2
	Postgraduate	48	14.1
Years in Service	Below 5 years	76	22.4
	Below 2 years	6	1.8
	2-4 years	70	20.5
	4-6 years	139	40.8
	6-8 years	105	30.8
	8 years and above	21	6.2

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis indicates that respondents held moderately positive perceptions of performance management practices within the selected county governments. The highest-rated aspect was the fairness and transparency of the performance evaluation process ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.35$), followed by the provision of fair performance evaluations by supervisors ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.30$). Respondents also moderately agreed that supervisors provided adequate explanations for performance-related decisions ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.40$) and that performance ratings were based on measurable objectives ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.26$). However, lower ratings were recorded for the clarity of performance management objectives ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.23$) and the fairness of supervisory decisions based on individual employee performance ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.35$), suggesting areas requiring improvement. The overall composite mean score of 3.12 ($SD = 0.69$) demonstrates that while performance management practices are generally perceived positively, employees expressed only moderate satisfaction, indicating the need for county governments to strengthen objective setting,

transparency, and fairness in performance evaluations. These findings support studies by Njoroge, Kihoro, and Kosgei (2020) and Ogolla and Oluoch (2019), which found that clear performance expectations and fair evaluations enhance employee commitment, while also reinforcing Aden and Omuya's (2024) argument that perceived unfairness in performance management can undermine employee commitment and motivation.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Performance Management Practice

Statements on Performance Management Practice	Mean	Std. Dev
The county has clear performance management objectives.	2.92	1.23
The county's performance ratings are based on measurable objectives.	3.13	1.26
The county provides fair performance evaluations through supervisors.	3.34	1.3
The county's performance evaluation process is fair and transparent.	3.54	1.35
Supervisors make fair decisions based on individual employee performance.	3.08	1.35
Supervisors provide adequate explanations for all performance-related decisions.	3.18	1.4
Performance Management Practice	3.12	0.69

The descriptive analysis indicates that employees in the selected county governments exhibited a moderate level of commitment. The highest-rated indicator was commitment arising from values such as seniority, benefits, authority, and job security ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.16$), suggesting that employees largely remain committed due to the benefits and security associated with their jobs. Respondents also moderately agreed that they were unlikely to leave their current jobs for another ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.38$) and that they felt a sense of obligation to the people in the county ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.26$). Similarly, employees reported emotional attachment to their jobs ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.42$) and a willingness to spend the rest of their careers in county government service ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.30$). The relatively lower mean score for staying due to the belief that it would not be right to leave at the present time ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.34$) indicates comparatively weaker normative commitment. Overall, the composite mean score of 3.05 ($SD = 0.56$) suggests a moderate but positive level of employee commitment among county government employees. These findings imply that commitment is influenced by a combination of affective, continuance, and normative factors, with job-related benefits and security playing a particularly important role. The results are consistent with studies by Theresa and Vijayabanu (2016) and Tugel and Kilic (2021), which found that emotional attachment, perceived benefits, and value alignment contribute significantly to employee commitment, while also supporting Armstrong's (2019) assertion that committed employees are more likely to contribute to organizational effectiveness and goal attainment.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Employee Commitments

Statements on Employee Commitment	Mean	Std. Dev
I am likely to spend the rest of my career working for the county government.	3.29	1.3
I feel emotionally attached to my job in the county government.	3.28	1.42
I am not likely to leave my current job for another one.	3.33	1.38
One of the reasons I do not leave my county job is the scarcity of alternative opportunities.	3.25	1.43
Even if leaving might be advantageous, I feel it would not be the right thing to do at this time.	3.06	1.34
I am not leaving my job because I feel a sense of obligation to the people in the county.	3.3	1.26
I am committed to my job because of certain values such as seniority, benefits, authority, and job security.	3.71	1.16
Employee Commitment	3.05	0.56

4.3. Correlation Results

The correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between performance management practices and employee commitment in the selected county governments ($r = 0.731$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). This implies that improvements in performance management practices are associated with substantial increases in employee commitment, indicating that the two variables move in the same direction. The strength of the correlation suggests that employees are more likely to exhibit higher levels of commitment when performance management systems are perceived as fair, transparent, objective, and supportive. These findings support the argument that effective performance management plays a critical role in fostering employee commitment by enhancing motivation, trust, and engagement within the workplace. The results are consistent with Kibet, Biwot, and Kemboi (2020), who found that performance management practices such as goal setting, performance appraisal, feedback, and reward systems positively influence employee morale, loyalty, productivity, and organizational commitment. Therefore, county governments can strengthen employee commitment by investing in fair and transparent performance management systems that align employee efforts with organizational objectives.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

		Employee Commitment	Performance Management Practice
Employee Commitment	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Performance Management Practice	Pearson Correlation	.731**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	341	341

** Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4. Regression Results

The regression analysis demonstrated that performance management practices have a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on employee commitment in the selected county governments in Kenya. The model explained 53.5% of the variation in employee commitment ($R^2 = 0.535$), indicating that performance management practices are a major determinant of employee commitment, while the remaining 46.5% is explained by other factors not included in the model. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 390.146, p = 0.000$), confirming its suitability for predicting employee commitment. The findings further revealed that performance management practice had a significant positive influence on employee commitment ($\beta = 0.731, t = 19.752, p = 0.000$), implying that a one-unit improvement in performance management practices increases employee commitment by 0.588 units. thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. The study therefore concludes that performance management practice significantly influences employee commitment in selected county governments in Kenya.

$$Y = 1.217 + 0.731x_4 + \epsilon \dots\dots\dots\text{Model 4.4}$$

Y = Employee Commitment, X_4 = Performance Management Practice, 1.217 = Constant term, 0.588 = Regression coefficient for Performance Management Practice, ϵ = Error term

This model implies that a one-unit increase in Performance Management Practice leads to a 0.588-unit increase in Employee Commitment, holding other factors constant. The findings of the current study reveal that Performance Management Practice exerts a strong and positive influence on Employee Commitment. These findings are strongly supported and consistent with existing empirical and theoretical literature, with minimal contradiction. The results agree with and support Njoroge, Kihoro, and Kosgei (2020), who conceptualized performance management as encompassing objective setting, performance rating, feedback, and management decisions. The strong standardized coefficient obtained in this study confirms that structured performance discussions and feedback mechanisms enhance employees' psychological attachment and willingness to go the extra mile.

Similarly, the findings are supported by Armstrong (2019), who emphasized the importance of comprehensive performance measurement systems such as 360-degree feedback, where performance is evaluated by supervisors, peers, subordinates, and customers. Such inclusive feedback systems shape employee attitudes, skills, and behaviors, thereby strengthening commitment to organizational goals. The results also agree with Muhando and Juma (2020), who observed that clear objective setting provides employees with direction, while fair performance rating enables supervisors to make decisions that foster positive behavioral change. The current findings confirm that when performance management practices are transparent and goal-oriented, employee commitment is significantly enhanced.

Further, the findings are consistent with Mwaniki and Omuya (2024), who noted that performance management practices combining individual objectives, regular evaluations, and performance-based decisions increase employee participation in

managing their own performance. This participation strengthens ownership of goals and commitment to organizational success. The study findings are also supported by Aden and Omuya (2024) and Karim, Were, and Kwasira (2023), who established that measurable and challenging goals, coupled with timely and accurate feedback, increase motivation, satisfaction, and commitment. The high explanatory power of performance management practice in the current study reinforces the argument that fair appraisal systems positively shape employee attitudes and behavior.

Emerging evidence from Makhulo and Mboya (2024) further supports the findings by demonstrating that performance management enables organizations to identify committed and efficient employees and to make informed training and development decisions. However, the study also agrees with the cautionary position of Otieno and Nyakwara (2024) that subjective and biased appraisal practices undermine commitment, emphasizing the need for fairness and objectivity. The findings are additionally supported by Otieno and Nyakwara (2024), Jepkorir and Nchanga (2022), and Chebet et al. (2021), whose studies revealed that effective performance appraisal, feedback management, and utilization of appraisal reports significantly influence employee retention, performance, and engagement. Although Jepkorir and Nchanga (2022) noted dissatisfaction when appraisal outcomes were not linked to rewards and career growth, this does not contradict the current study but rather reinforces the need for integrating appraisal outcomes with reward and development systems. However, the findings partially contrast with earlier studies such as Moraa and Datche (2019) and Ogolla and Oluoch (2019), which reported strong performance outcomes but weaker employee commitment where objectives were not jointly discussed and agreed upon at the beginning of the performance period. This contrast suggests that performance management practices must be participatory and transparent to fully translate performance gains into sustained employee commitment.

Table 5: Regression Model; Performance Management Practices and Employee Commitment

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.217	0.095		12.804	0.000
Performance management practice	0.588	0.030	0.731	19.752	0.000
R Squared	0.535				
Adjusted R Squared	0.534				
F statistic	390.14				
P value	6				
	0.000				

a Dependent Variable: Employee Commitment

5. Conclusions

The study found that performance management practice had a significant effect on employee commitment in the selected county government in Kenya. The findings further showed that the effect of performance management practice in the selected

county government in Kenya was positive. The study concluded that performance management practice positively and significantly affects employee commitment in the selected county governments in Kenya; implying that a unit increase in performance practice results to an increase in employee commitment. Basing on the prediction that performance management practice has no effect significant on employee commitment in selected county governments in Kenya; the study concluded by rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative. Therefore, performance management practice had a significant relationship with employee commitment in selected county governments in Kenya.

6. Managerial and Policy Recommendations

The study recommends that management in the selected county government should regularly give employee chance to set objectives, carry out evaluation and make decisions based on individual performance this would promote employee commitment. The county government should be able to come up with proper mechanism for recognizing good performance in the work place. They can as well review the current performance management practice to ensure fairness, consistency and openness in setting performance objectives. The study recommends policy design that emphasizes discussion and setting of targets at the beginning of the performance period. The policy should emphasize on objectives which are; specific, measurable, achievable, reliable and time bound. The study recommended policy development that strengthens positive supervisor and employee relation that regularly encourages positive performance setting, evaluation and that facilitates prudent decisions based on performance individual performance.

7. Further Research

The study established that performance management practices significantly influence employee commitment in selected county governments in Kenya. However, future studies should examine additional human resource management practices such as training and development, compensation and rewards, career progression, employee involvement, and work-life balance to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employee commitment. This recommendation is supported by the regression results, which showed that performance management practice explained 53.5% of the variation in employee commitment, leaving 46.5% attributable to other factors not included in the model. Additionally, since the study was conducted in only five of the forty-seven county governments in Kenya, future research should replicate the study in other counties or undertake a nationwide comparative analysis to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Further studies may also adopt longitudinal research designs to examine the long-term effects of performance management practices on employee commitment and provide stronger evidence on causal relationships.

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