

Building High-Performing Teams: Analyzing the Influence of Employee Development Practices on Private University Performance in Kenya

Justice Mutua J.N., Ph.D., Diana Wanjiku

School of Business and Economics, Daystar University

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.801109>

Received: 09 January 2024; Accepted: 11 January 2024; Published: 09 February 2024

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the intricate relationship between employee development practices and the performance of private universities. Employing a descriptive research design, the study aims to comprehensively analyze the effect of employee development practices on overall performance outcomes within the higher education sector. Data collection was meticulously executed through well-crafted questionnaires, administered to a judiciously purposively selected sample of 121 respondents from private universities in Kenya. The empirical findings of this research unveil a robust and affirmative correlation between employee development practices and performance. Rigorous correlation analysis further elucidates the nuanced dynamics, indicating a statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.325$, $p < 0.05$). This study establishes a substantive and affirmative effect of employee development practices. Beyond the institution's confines, these findings provide valuable insights for private universities grappling with the complex challenges of contemporary higher education. The implications of this research extend to inform strategic decision-making and policy formulation aimed at optimizing employee development practices for enhanced performance outcomes. In light of these outcomes, this study recommends an extension of the investigation to encompass the realm of public universities in Kenya.

Keywords: strategic leadership, employee development practices, university performance.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the dynamic landscape of the twenty-first century, organizations face a perpetual need for robust leadership to achieve their objectives (Fadhli, 2020). Extensive research over the past decades highlights prevalent leadership weaknesses within global firms. To remain relevant amid the ever-evolving business environment, leaders must cultivate a distinctive edge in their leadership practices, as emphasized by Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2016). This entails a comprehensive examination and development of employee development practices, the mechanisms through which leaders guide their teams in executing responsibilities and leveraging authority to fulfill organizational goals (Khajeh, 2018).

Employee development practices encompass a spectrum of essential elements, as outlined by Lee and Puranam (2018). These may include employee development practices, employee development practices, innovation practices, ethical practices, and organizational culture. However, Arubayi (2022) cautions that the successful implementation of well-thought-out practices hinges on effective leadership guidance.

Organizational performance stands as a central focus and concern for businesses across diverse industries. Regardless of the sector, every enterprise strives to enhance its overall performance, maintain market

viability, and foster sustained growth over time (Fidelia & Ogor, 2022). Fidelia and Ogor (2022) posit that an organization's performance is contingent upon its ability to achieve profitability and satisfy customers. Institutions of higher learning, for instance, gauge their performance through factors such as student enrollment, graduation rates, university rankings, publications, and grants (Chepkurgat, Kipkebut, & Auka, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The past decade has ushered in profound transformations in the performance and management dynamics of higher education institutions, as noted by García-Morales, Garrido-Moreno, and Martín-Rojas (2021). Universities, especially in Kenya, are grappling with swiftly evolving landscapes marked by digital disruptions, heightened public scrutiny, cost crises, consensus governance, reallocation challenges, productivity shifts, information revolutions, and transformative management paradigms (Adbow, 2018). Despite concerted efforts to navigate these environmental dynamics, approximately 50% of change programs in Kenyan institutions encounter obstacles, reaching a standstill or failing to yield anticipated outcomes (CUE, 2017).

Ibrahim and Ogohi (2019) attribute the failure of transformation projects in private colleges to the absence of effective strategic leadership. This deficiency in competent strategic leadership, as Carvalho et al. (2021) highlight, has contributed to a decline in the overall performance of educational institutions. In Turkey, Kasalak et al. (2023) underscore the effect of various employee development practices on the job satisfaction of academic staff, while in South Africa, Madzimure (2020) emphasizes the need for leadership practices in universities to effectively address management challenges.

Instances of poor leadership negatively affecting university performance are not isolated incidents. In 2018, the vice chancellor of Scott Christian University was reportedly removed due to poor leadership that adversely effected the institution's performance (Muswii, 2018). A subsequent report by Kenya's Auditor General raised concerns about multiple universities, including the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, and Multimedia University, grappling with substantial debts (Odhiambo, 2019). These instances prompt apprehension regarding the nature and extent of senior management competencies in Kenyan institutions of higher learning and their consequential effects on performance.

In this context, where private universities encounter challenges in successfully implementing change programs, there is a pressing need to understand the influence of employee development practices on their overall performance. However, despite the critical importance of this issue, there exists a significant gap in the literature, with insufficient studies exploring the effect of employee development practices on the performance of private universities in Kenya. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the effect of employee development practices on the performance of private universities in Kenya.

Purpose of the Study

1. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of employee development practices on the performance of private universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Upper Echelon Leadership Theory

The core tenets of this theory posit that the knowledge, experience, and skills possessed by strategic leaders

exert a direct effect on organizational outcomes over time (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Predictors deemed essential for employee development practices and organizational effectiveness revolve around the accumulation of knowledge, experience, and skills. Hambrick (2007) introduced two additional moderators, namely management discretion and executive job desire, to refine the theory further. In the context of the upper echelon hypothesis, the level of managerial discretion within a firm is closely correlated with its performance, granting managers greater latitude to influence their staff.

Despite its robust explanatory power, the upper echelon hypothesis and its subsequent revisions have been critiqued for not fully accounting for the ethical standards prevalent in various industries (Banda, 2022). The theory assumes a direct alignment between leadership attitudes and organizational operations, an assumption that may not universally hold true. Instances exist where organizational practices deviate from the ethical considerations espoused by top management, and in certain scenarios, the ethical standards of an organization may not be exclusively determined by its leadership traits (Van der Zee & Swagerman, 2009).

While acknowledging these critiques, the foundational premise of the upper echelon hypothesis — that an organization is intricately linked to the attributes of its top leadership — remains robust. This theory assumes paramount significance in the present study as it forms the basis for investigating how the attributes of leaders, particularly in the context of employee development practices, effect the overall success of the university.

General Literature

Employee development emerges as a pivotal instrument in enhancing academic staff productivity within higher learning institutions, as underscored by Pepple and Adolphus (2019). This deliberate and planned exercise is oriented toward fostering individual growth, development, and overall organizational productivity, thus contributing to the broader economic landscape. Asif (2019) delves into the multifaceted nature of employee development practices, encompassing recruitment, support, and investments in employees through various avenues such as training, education, coaching, internships, human resources management, and mentoring. These practices, according to Asif, culminate in heightened employee satisfaction, improved performance, and, ultimately, enhanced organizational performance.

Leadership involvement in mentoring processes, as noted by Bett (2017), emerges as a key factor in augmenting productivity. The mentor-mentee relationship serves to reduce errors, enhance mentees' understanding of their responsibilities, and familiarize them with the standards vital to their roles. This engagement facilitates quick adjustments and effective coping mechanisms in the workplace, simultaneously strengthening the bond between mentors and mentees.

Investments in training, growth, health, and support for human resources are emphasized as essential, with collective human attitudes, competencies, and capacities influencing corporate performance and production. The current competitive landscape prioritizes staff training, with forward-thinking businesses focusing on hiring for both process and people rather than solely for technology.

Recognizing the costs associated with training, organizations are compelled to acknowledge the pivotal role of employee development in shaping their bottom line. Pepple et al. (2022) emphasize that employees benefit from training by acquiring better skills and capacities to navigate workplace challenges. Consequently, employee development becomes indispensable in equipping organizational human resources with the necessary abilities to achieve set goals in a dynamic and competitive environment.

Student Enrolment

Student enrolment in private universities present a dynamic landscape in Kenya. Private institutions have

experienced an upswing in enrolment, contrasting with a decline in public universities (Nakweya, 2020). Private universities in Kenya, characterized by a stringent admission criterion based on academic records, plays a significant role in shaping student experiences. Factors such as background, academic achievement, and integration into the university's social networks effect the time it takes for students to graduate (Aiken et al., 2020).

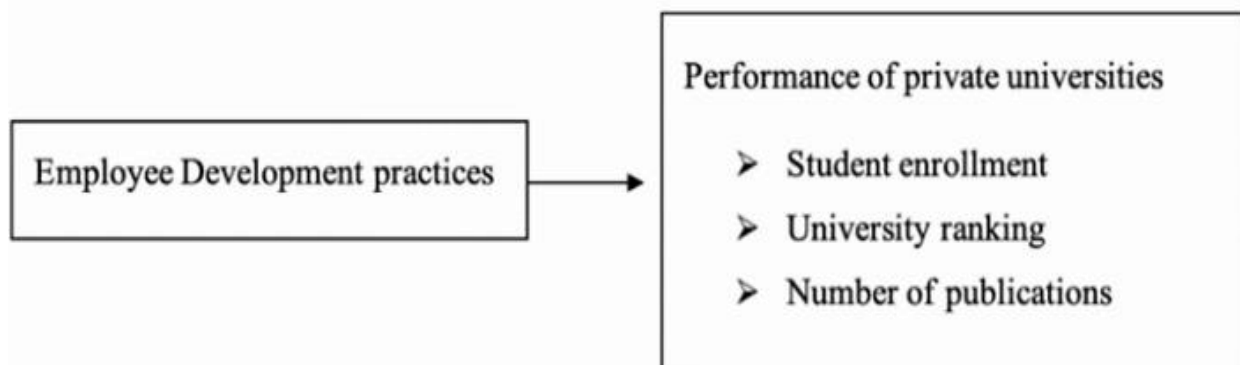
University Ranking

University rankings, influencing students' choices, are diverse and contentious. They assess institutions based on parameters like research production, academic reputation, and internationalization. Private universities in Kenya, though not disclosing an acceptance rate, has secured a notable position in Kenyan private university rankings, reflecting its standing among peers (Marklein, 2023).

Number of Publications

Publications serve as conduits for disseminating scientific knowledge. The Research Directorate at private universities in Kenya, aligned with diverse disciplines, underscores their commitment to research-driven advancement. The current study aims to explore how employee development practices have influenced performance, particularly in terms of publications and grants. These pursuits align with the broader goals of advancing knowledge, contributing to societal development, and bolstering the university's mission.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Source: Mutua and Wanjiku (2023)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of employee development practices and their effect on organizational performance, this study adopts a descriptive research design, a method well-established for its effectiveness in elucidating the characteristics of variables within a defined context, as articulated by Gupta and Rangi (2018). Descriptive research, particularly relevant in corporate settings, serves as a valuable tool for systematically unraveling the attributes and characteristics of employees. Its structured approach facilitates the examination of pivotal factors, including but not limited to resistance to change and readiness for change.

The primary conduit for data collection in this study is structured questionnaires, strategically chosen for their efficiency in methodically gathering information. By focusing on the employees of private universities in Kenya, this study targets individuals occupying key positions in top and middle management within the organization. To ensure a representative sample, 121 respondents were randomly selected from an estimated target population of 173, contributing to the richness and diversity of perspectives.

In a bid to fortify the reliability and appropriateness of the questionnaire, a meticulous pre-test was conducted at Daystar University. Located within the Machakos and Nairobi counties, Daystar University shares contextual similarities with private universities in Kenya. The participation of ten respondents from Daystar University in the pre-test played a pivotal role in refining the research instrument, offering valuable insights, and ensuring its seamless alignment with the overarching research goals. This pre-test stands as a critical step in enhancing the robustness and validity of the research methodology, paving the way for a nuanced exploration of the interplay between employee development practices and organizational performance.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Inferential Statistics

Table 1. Pearson’s Correlation Results

	Performance	Employee Development practices
Performance.	1	0.325
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.033
Employee Development practices	0.325	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.033	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Source: Mutua and Wanjiku (2023)

The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.325 between performance and Employee Development practices, indicating a moderate positive relationship. A significant p-value of 0.033 (< 0.05) provided strong evidence, suggesting a noteworthy association between the two variables. This suggests that the adoption of Employee Development practices in the university may lead to improved performance, aligning with Balian, Farah, and Braendle’s (2020) findings of a strong correlation between Employee Development practices and performance.

Summary of Key Findings

On employee development practices, all constructs and questions demonstrated a mean above 3.7 on the Likert scale, indicating majority agreement. Pearson correlation coefficient affirmed a significant positive moderate relationship ($r = 0.325, p < 0.05$) between employee development practices and performance. These findings align with Agbebi’s (2018) discovery of a positive relationship between employee development practices and performance. The research underscores a statistically significant positive relationship across all employee development constructs and performance, emphasizing the substantial positive effect of these practices on performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Private universities in Kenya exhibits moderate levels of employee development practices, including

educational advancement, training, benchmarking, and peer-to-peer mentorships. The respondents' agreement percentages (45.2% to 85.2%) and mean values (3.72 to 4.47) substantiate this finding. Additionally, innovation practices are moderately applied, with agreement percentages ranging from 35.6% to 73.8% and means from 2.92 to 3.93. The research reiterates a strong statistically significant positive relationship between employee development practices and performance ($r = 0.325$, $p < 0.05$). These correlations underscore a significant positive effect of employee development practices on private universities in Kenya, echoing the conclusions drawn by Carvalho et al. (2021) and Chepkurgat et al. (2019) regarding the strong positive relationship between employee development practices and performance. This study highlights the critical relationship between employee development practices and the performance of private universities in Kenya. The findings suggest a moderate positive correlation between these variables, indicating that investments in employee development can contribute to improved overall performance. The research emphasizes the need for strategic leadership, effective change management, and financial prudence to address the challenges faced by higher education institutions in Kenya. To ensure sustainable progress, it is imperative for institutions to prioritize the continuous development of their workforce, aligning employee growth with organizational goals. By implementing the recommended strategies, private universities in Kenya can enhance their resilience, adaptability, and effectiveness in the face of evolving landscapes, ultimately contributing to the advancement of higher education in the region.

Recommendations

Enhanced Strategic Leadership Training

Institutions should invest in strategic leadership training programs for senior management, focusing on the development of competencies necessary for navigating the rapidly evolving higher education landscape. This training should emphasize effective change management strategies to ensure the successful implementation of transformation projects.

Promotion of Employee Development Practices

Private universities in Kenya should prioritize and actively promote employee development practices. This includes investing in continuous training, mentorship programs, and professional development opportunities for academic and administrative staff. Emphasizing the importance of employee growth and skill enhancement will contribute to improved job satisfaction and overall performance.

Comprehensive Financial Oversight

Given the concerns raised by the Auditor General regarding substantial debts in multiple universities, there is a need for comprehensive financial oversight and management. Institutions should implement robust financial planning strategies, conduct regular audits, and prioritize financial sustainability to mitigate the negative impact of financial challenges on overall performance.

Collaborative Research and Knowledge Sharing

Recognizing the existing gap in the literature, institutions, policymakers, and researchers should collaborate to conduct more extensive studies on the influence of employee development practices on the performance of private universities in Kenya. Knowledge sharing and collaboration can lead to the development of tailored strategies that address specific challenges within the Kenyan higher education context.

Recommendation for Further Research

Given the singular focus on private universities in Kenya, future research should extend to other universities

for comparative analysis. Exploring diverse organizational settings beyond educational institutions and conducting cross-border studies can offer a broader understanding of the effectiveness of employee development practices in achieving sustainable development goals. Additionally, comparative studies involving public and private institutions within and outside Kenya would contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of employee development practices' effect on organizational performance in the context of national development goals.

REFERENCES

1. Banda, N. (2022). The Role of Strategic Leadership in Organizational Development. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research*.
2. Beck, C. M., Randhawa, P., DeTienne, K. B., & Bone, S. A. (2020). Assessing the Effects of Service Variability on Consumer Confidence and Behavior. *Journal of Service Research*.
3. Bhandari, P. (2022). Ethical Considerations in Research | Types & Examples. Retrieved from [www.scribbr.com](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/research-ethics/): <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/research-ethics/>
4. Carvalho, M., Cabral, I., & Verdasca, J. L. (2021). Strategy and Strategic Leadership in Education: A Scoping Review. *Sec. Leadership in Education*.
5. Coban, O. e. (2019). Top manager's organizational change management capacity and their strategic leadership levels at ministry of national education.
6. Cote, C. (2022). Product Innovation: What Business Leaders Need To Know. Retrieved from [online.hbs.edu](https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/product-innovation): <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/product-innovation>
7. Hamada, K., & Hiraoka, S. (2016). Management of Innovation Strategy in Japanese Companies. *Japanese Management and International Studies*.
8. Hunitie, M. (2018). Effect Of Strategic Leadership On Strategic Competitive Advantage Through Strategic Thinking And Strategic Planning: A Bi-Meditational Research.
9. Ireland, R. D., Hoskisson, R., & Hitt, M. A. (2013). *The Management of Strategy* (10 ed.). Mason, OH: South-Western CENGAGE Learning.
10. Kasalak, G., Güneri, B., Ehtiyar, V. R., Apaydin, Ç., & Türker, G. Ö. (2022). The relation between leadership styles in higher education institutions and academic staff's job satisfaction. *Front psychol*.
11. Landau, P. (2022). Total Quality Management (TQM): A Quick Guide. Retrieved from [www.projectmanager.com](https://www.projectmanager.com/blog/total-quality-management): <https://www.projectmanager.com/blog/total-quality-management>
12. Li, H., & Atuahene-Gima, K. (2021). Product Innovation Strategy and the Performance of New Technology Ventures in China. *The Academy of Management Journal*.
13. Marx, H. (2020). University branding: How to build your school's brand on social media. Retrieved from [Sproutsocial.com](https://sproutsocial.com/insights/university-branding-on-social-media/): <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/university-branding-on-social-media/>
14. Mbugua, E. W. (2021). Innovation Strategies Adopted by Equity Bank Limited to Gain Competitive Advantage in Kenya. Retrieved from [erepository.uonbi.ac.ke](https://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/157113): <https://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/157113>
15. Mcleod, S. (2023). Validity In Research: Definitions, Types, & Examples. Retrieved from [www.simplypsychology.org](https://www.simplypsychology.org/validity.html): <https://www.simplypsychology.org/validity.html>
16. Middleton, F. (2019). Reliability vs. Validity in Research | Difference, Types and Examples. Retrieved from [www.scribbr.com](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/reliability-vs-validity/): <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/reliability-vs-validity/>
17. odhiambo, M. (2019). [www.the-star.co.ke](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2019-05-09-broke-uon-ku-hold-workers-sh4bn-deductions/). Retrieved from *Broke UoN, KU hold Sh4bn of staff cash*: <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2019-05-09-broke-uon-ku-hold-workers-sh4bn-deductions/>
18. Porumboiu, D. (2021). Product Innovation – What is it and how to do it right. Retrieved from [www.viima.com](https://www.viima.com/blog/product-innovation): <https://www.viima.com/blog/product-innovation>
19. Rubera, D., Ngala, M. O., & Ngui, T. (2022). Relationship Between Leadership Practices And Performance Of Chartered Universities In Kenya. *African Journal of Emerging Issues*.
20. Sales, F., & Holak, B. (2018). strategic leadership. Retrieved from [www.techtarget.com](https://www.techtarget.com/searchcio/definition/strategic-leadership): <https://www.techtarget.com/searchcio/definition/strategic-leadership>
21. Sebastian, N. (2023). The Sample Size Calculator – Slovin's Formula. Retrieved from

- sebastian.com: <https://sebastian.com/sample-size-calculator-slovins-formula/>
22. Shalni, G. (2020). Technology-Enhanced Learning in Developing Nations: A review. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*.
 23. SPU. (2023). THE UNIVERSITY. Retrieved from www.spu.ac.ke: <https://www.spu.ac.ke/index.php/about-spu>
 24. WallstreetmojoTeam. (2023). Total Quality Management. Retrieved from www.wallstreetmojo.com: <https://www.wallstreetmojo.com/total-quality-management/>
 25. Whaley, J. (2023). Understanding Target Population in Research. Retrieved from www.ovationmr.com: <https://www.ovationmr.com/target-population-in-research/>
 26. Wróblewska, M., & Bernat, M. (2017). The Way of Building Human Capital in China. Retrieved from www.intechopen.com: <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/57257>