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Work Progress Feedback and Employees Performance in Organizations; A Case Study of Water and Sanitation Companies in Nyeri County, Kenya

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Abstract: Work progress feedback has played a critical role in creation of a conducive and harmonious relationship in organizations all over the world. Indeed it is one factor that is essential in enhancement of service delivery in organizations. Work progress feedback is the process of providing credible and factual information regarding aspects of employees' performance or understanding in order to help them meet individual, group and organizational goals. The general objective of the study was to establish whether there is a relationship between work progress feedback and employees' performance in water and sanitation companies in Nyeri County. Specific objectives of this study were specificity of work progress feedback; mode of work progress feedback and timeliness of work progress feedback on employees' performance. The study used stratified random sampling to select a sample size of 77 respondents from a target population of 383 employees in Water and Sanitation Companies in Nyeri County. The relevant data was collected using questionnaires from 62 respondents representing 80.5% response rate out of the probable 77. Collected data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) to generate descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were generated from the data while linear and multiple regression analysis was done to establish relationship among the variables in the study. The results indicated that water and sanitation companies' have worked progress feedback mechanisms though inadequate. The study findings revealed that timeliness of work progress feedback and mode of work progress feedback have positive and significant effects on employees' performance while specificity of work progress feedback was found to have a positive but insignificant effect on employees' performance. The researcher recommended work progress feedback to be reviewed so as to incorporate inputs from all the parties, the researcher also recommended on providing work progress feedback in time by using appropriate modes. The researcher suggested that future research could focus on other types of composition variables such as workers attitude towards work progress feedback among other variables to establish whether they have an effect on employees' performance.

Keywords: work progress feedback, performance, service delivery and organizational goals

INTRODUCTION

Work progress feedback is the information employees receive about their performance. It conveys an evaluation about the quality of their performance behaviours [1]. Giving feedback, according to London [2] is the activity of providing information to members of staff about their performance on job expectations. Work progress feedback is the managers' way of giving employees information about how they are doing and should be provided to employees on a regular basis. This enables them to know how to change what they are doing poorly and keep doing what they are doing well. It should be clear, appropriate and with instructions on how to make any needed changes [3].

To be most effective, work progress feedback should be timely. This in essence means that feedback should be provided as close as possible to the occurrence of the behaviour in question otherwise it

will be of little use to the employees. Waiting until the annual performance appraisal to address poor performance, may lead to resentment from employees that they were not given the opportunity to correct the problem on time [4]. Work progress feedback should be specific. According to Gratton [5] a manager should not make vague generalizations when providing feedback to employees but should instead describe the undesirable behaviour in exact terms. He should be able to substantiate in a very specific language, the importance of performing the job correctly and the consequences of continued poor performance.

Work progress feedback should also be delivered in a mode that ensures that the intended message or instruction is what gets to the employee. This means that the mode in which work progress feedback is given should be clear and understandable. Constructive feedback encourages employees to express

opinions, bringing in the emergence of an environment that is characterized by openness, fairness and creativity. With effective work progress feedback processes, employees will not be working blindly and hence, will achieve their expected performance levels successfully. Information is critical and should have output specifications as employees have to know what they are expected to produce. They need to get work progress feedback [5].

Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between work progress feedback and employees' performance in organizations, a case of water and sanitation companies in Nyeri County. Specific objectives of this study were specificity of work progress feedback; mode of work progress feedback and timeliness of work progress feedback on employees' performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The research study was anchored on the following theories; Reinforcement Theory, Goal Setting Theory and Expectancy Theory.

Reinforcement Theory

This theory emphasizes that people are motivated to perform or to avoid certain behaviors because of past outcomes that have resulted from those behaviors [6]. Work progress feedback also provides employees with information about the progress they are making towards their goals [7]. According to Swart, Mann, Brown and Price [8] reinforcement theory focuses on performance consequences when frequent, contingent, positive consequences follow performance and where there is substantial evidence of improvements. Reinforcement works because expectancies established at the beginning of the learning loop are confirmed or not confirmed during the feedback process and delivered in a manner that is constructive and also on time. According to this theory work progress feedback can motivate employees, and secondly, can provide information that they can use to correct or improve their performance.

Goal Setting Theory

The goal setting theory states that individuals who are provided with specific, difficult but attainable goals perform better than those given easy, non-specific, or no goals at all. It however stipulates that, the individuals must have sufficient ability, accept the goals and receive feedback related to performance [9].

Work progress feedback which in essence is knowledge of results can lead to increased effort and performance for at least four reasons; it may induce an employee who previously did not have specific goals to set a goal to improve performance by a certain amount, may induce an employee to raise his/her goal level after

attaining a previous goal or inform an employee that his/her current level of effort is insufficient to attain set goals; and may lead to increased efforts informing an employee on ways to improve methods of performing the task [10].

Expectancy Theory

The theory outlines that the intensity of a tendency of a person to perform in a particular way is dependent on the intensity of an expectation that the said performance will be followed by a definite outcome and will appeal to the individual. The theory states that employee's motivation is an outcome of how much an individual desires a reward (valence), the assessment of the likelihood that the effort will lead to expected performance (expectancy) and the belief that the performance will lead to a reward (instrumentality).

Concrete acts must accompany statements of intent. Managers should try as much as possible to build a culture that good performance will result in valued rewards and link directly the specific performances they desire to the rewards that are desired by the employees. It is important for employees to see clearly the reward process at work as they have expectations that there will be feedback on goal attainment.

Work progress feedback

Work progress feedback is defined as the process of providing credible and factual information regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding in order to help employees meet individual, group and organizational goals [11]. People work hard and expect to rank better when they learn through work progress feedback.

The importance of work progress feedback in organizations cannot be over emphasized. There is hardly any sector that can achieve expected levels of output and customer satisfaction without giving adequate work progress feedback. Despite the prevalence of feedback mechanisms in management interventions, feedback is not always as effective as is typically assumed [12].

Work progress feedback, when done in the right way, can lead to better performance, higher productivity, more job satisfaction, better relationships at work, and less conflict between managers and employees [13]. Research has also suggested that subordinates receiving work progress feedback from higher sources in credibility see the feedback as more accurate, the source as more perceptive, are more satisfied with the feedback, and are more likely to use the suggestions offered in the feedback [11]. Reassessment, evaluation and capacity building of individuals is therefore expected to be interactive and participatory and intended to give information as well as elicit feedback between both the employer and the employee [14].

There are different sources of work progress feedback and may come from; managers and supervisors, employees, measurement systems, peers and customers among other stakeholders. Trust in management is of utmost importance if employees are to be involved in two way communication [15]. Conducting regular surveys on employee opinion is very useful as they are one of the leading employee voice mechanisms [16].

Specificity of Work Progress Feedback

According to Goodman, Wood and Hendrickx [17] specificity of work progress feedback is defined as the level of objectivity of information presented in feedback messages. Specific (or elaborated) work progress feedback provides information about particular responses or behaviours beyond just their accuracy and tends to be more directive than facilitative. In this study specificity of work progress feedback was looked at in terms of being well detailed, clear and accurate.

Work progress feedback must reflect what was accomplished in terms that are precise and measurable. It should be specific and actually works best when it relates to a specific goal. Establishing employees' performance expectations and goals before work begins is the key to providing tangible, objective and powerful work progress feedback. Telling employees that they are doing well because they exceeded their goal by 10% is more effective than simply telling them that they are doing a good job [17].

Timeliness of Work Progress Feedback

Timeliness of work progress feedback according to Carson [18] reflects the length of time between its availability and the event or activity it relates to. Pulakos [19] argues that for work progress feedback to have the most value, it needs to be given in close proximity to an event as it will not add any value or help when the employees receive feedback many months after something has happened. On-going work progress feedback can be formal or informal and should occur as part of the daily work routine. Research has shown that in organizations where the employees report higher levels of on-going formal and informal feedback, performance levels are higher [19]. In this study timeliness of work progress feedback was looked into as consistent, continuous and that is given proximity to an event.

The most respected leaders are those who take the challenge to provide meaningful work progress feedback to their employees on a timely and consistent basis [35]. Delayed negative work progress feedback becomes meaningless as by the time it is delivered many more mistakes may have been committed by the employee whereas delayed positive work progress feedback, may be a lost opportunity to build employees morale [20].

Mode of Work Progress Feedback

This is the manner or way of acting, delivering, communicating, doing, method or form in which work progress feedback is given. Work progress feedback should be given in a manner that will best help improvement of performance [21]. Since most people respond better to information presented in a positive way, feedback should be expressed in a positive manner. This is not however to say that information should be sugar coated. Work progress feedback is more effective when it reinforces what the employee did right and also identifies what needs to be improved in the future [21]. For the purposes of this study work progress feedback was considered in terms of being constructive, impersonal and interactive.

According to McDonald and Boud [22] there are many characteristics of worthwhile work progress feedback but the most important is the way in which it is given. The tone, the style and the content should be consistent, clear, simple, honest, accurate and fair. Employees should be provided with the opportunity to respond to any work progress feedback given to them, and their perspective taken on board. If their behaviour is good, more of it should be encouraged and where it is bad the manager should refer to a time when they had done something better as a positive comparison [22]. A feedback session should always end with an action plan for improvement [23].

Employee Performance

Work performance is the behaviour or actions that are relevant to the goals of an organization [24]. According to Viswesvaran [25] work performances are scalable actions, behaviours and outcomes that employees are engaged in or that are linked with and contribute to the overall organizational goals; for example work quality. Research has shown that exposing customers to happy employees results in customers having a positive attitude towards a product or a service [26].

The challenge for businesses today is to create an environment where employees understand and are committed to the company's vision, strategy and goals which requires a holistic and co-ordinated effort. Most, if not all, of the other key measures that reflect and drive organizational performance (customer satisfaction, innovation, profitability, productivity, loyalty and quality) are all products of engaged and committed employees [27]. If employees feel valued by the organization, a performance culture can develop that sets the stage for high levels of performance.

Employee commitment can be achieved through supervisors actively soliciting employee input on issues, acting on the input and communicating the same to employees, appreciating employees for jobs

well done, recognition, giving them feedback on their performance as often as possible, as well as discussing with them on their role in the organization and how they contribute to achieving organizational vision and goals [27].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The target population comprised of 383 employees of the water and sanitation companies in Nyeri County. The target population was looked into in terms of departments which formed the strata. The strata's were Commercial, Technical and Administration Departments.

The study used a descriptive research design. Descriptive research studies are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual or a group [28, 29]. This study was concerned with the relationship between work progress feedback and employees performance and hence the use of descriptive research design.

The study used stratified random sampling technique to select the respondents. This was a suitable technique since the target population existed in different departments that formed the strata. This was to ensure that each stratum was well represented and had equal representation in terms of gender, cadre and age. Simple random sampling was used to select the respondents who were included in the sample for each stratum. This according to Saunders [30] ensured that each of the strata was represented proportionally within the sample.

The sample size was 20% of the population in each department. According to Mugenda and Mugenda [31], 10% of the accessible population is enough for descriptive studies. The 20% sample size would ensure that there was a good response rate which would be representational for analysis and the sample size would have taken into account issues of non-response [32]. The sampling was per department and in each company that gave a total manageable sample of 77 respondents.

Data was obtained through the use of questionnaires. The self-administered questionnaires were hand delivered to the 77 respondents. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to facilitate analysis of data. Frequencies and percentages were generated from the data. In order to determine the relationship between work progress feedback and employee's performance Correlation and regression analysis were undertaken.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Specificity of Work Progress Feedback and Employees' Performance

This study established that well detailed work progress feedback was rated highest with a mean score of 3.77 followed by accuracy of work progress

feedback with a mean score of 3.76 while Clarity of work progress feedback had a mean score of 3.69.

The results of the linear regression indicated a weak positive but insignificant relationship between specificity of work progress feedback and employees' performance with $R=0.175$ and $p\text{-value } 0.173 > 0.05$ at 95% confidence level. This implies that specificity of work progress feedback had influence on employee's performance though statistically insignificant. The findings were consistent with earlier study by Gratton [36], who concluded that work progress feedback should be specific. Gratton stated that a manager should not make vague generalizations when providing feedback to employees but should instead describe the undesirable behaviour in exact terms. He should be able to substantiate in a very specific language, the importance of performing the job correctly and the consequences of continued poor performance.

Timeliness of Work Progress Feedback and Employees' Performance

The study established that continuous work progress feedback was rated highest with a mean score of 3.79 followed by consistency of work progress feedback with a mean score of 3.71 while work progress feedback given proximity to an event had a mean score of 3.69.

The results of the linear regression indicated a positive and significant relationship between timeliness of work progress feedback and employees' performance with $R=0.278$ and $p\text{-value } 0.029 < 0.05$ at 95% confidence level. This implies that timeliness of work progress feedback had influence on employee's performance and statistically significant.

The findings concurred with earlier studies by Latham & Locke [4], who asserted that to be most effective, work progress feedback should be timely. This in essence means that work progress feedback should be provided as close as possible to the occurrence of the behaviour in question otherwise it will be of little use to the employees since waiting until the annual performance appraisal to address poor performance. This can lead to resentment from employees that they were not given the opportunity to correct the problem on time. Mwitwa [33] also stated that thoughtful and informed work progress feedback should be shared on a regular basis as consistency is of utmost importance.

Mode of Work Progress Feedback and Employees' Performance

This study established that interactive work progress feedback was rated highest with a mean score of 3.77 followed by constructive work progress feedback with a mean score of 3.71 while impersonal work progress feedback had a mean score of 3.42.

The results of the linear regression indicated a positive and significant relationship between mode of work progress feedback and employees' performance with $R=0.262$ and $p\text{-value } 0.040 < 0.05$ at 95% confidence level. This implies that mode of work progress feedback has influence on employee's performance and statistically significant. The findings concurred with earlier studies by Moss & Sanchez [13], who asserted that work progress feedback, when done in the right way, can lead to better performance, higher productivity, more job satisfaction, better relationships at work, and less conflict between managers and employees.

Employees' Performance

The researcher sought to establish how respondents rated key components of employees' performance. This study established that customer satisfaction was rated highest with a mean score of 3.89 followed by the level of output with a mean score of 3.84 while meeting set targets had a mean score of 3.74.

Summary of Major Findings

This study focused on work progress feedback in terms of timeliness, mode and specificity. Work progress feedback being the information employees receive about their performance was evaluated where the respondents were required to rate water and sanitation companies' current position. The findings of the study on how the respondents' rated the companies' in terms of specificity of work progress feedback, timeliness of work progress feedback and mode of work progress feedback showed that majority of the respondents rated them as good though the minority rated them as either very good or poor.

This is an indication that water and sanitation companies' have work progress feedback mechanism though inadequate. In addition the findings revealed that majority of the respondents concurred that timeliness, mode and specificity of work progress feedback affect employees' performance. According to Sydanmaanlakka [34], and Gratton, [36], features of a work progress feedback culture include openness, confidence, respect for the individual, wide communication, acceptability of mistakes, positive atmosphere of co-operation, mutual support and a stress on continuous learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The study findings revealed that timeliness of work progress feedback had positive and significant effect on employees' performance. The findings reaffirmed the earlier findings which concluded that to be most effective, work progress feedback should be timely. It also revealed that continuous and consistent work progress feedback had a positive effect on employees' performance. The study also revealed that regular and consistent work progress feedback would contribute in enabling employees achieve their

performance targets. Where employees are continually provided with work progress feedback there is improved customer satisfaction as well as increased job satisfaction. When details of performance are fresh and current; employees are able to remember and undertake necessary adjustments in regard to their performance.

In addition, the study findings revealed that mode of work progress feedback had positive and significant effect on employees' performance. The findings were an indication that work progress feedback should be delivered through an interactive and constructive manner where both parties exchange ideas. The findings concurred with earlier researchers who stated that work progress feedback, when done in the right way can lead to better performance.

Work progress feedback was found to be the managers' way of giving employees information about how they are doing. The study also revealed that the respondents associated work progress feedback with improved performance and that where work progress feedback is given through participative and participatory sessions there is more productivity and meeting of set targets. Work progress feedback need to be delivered in a manner that will best help in improving performance and that this should be done in a positive and constructive manner. It is very important to understand that employees have feelings, emotions, opinions and affections that are unique to each employee and which should be considered while giving work progress feedback.

Further the findings revealed that specificity of work progress feedback is paramount and has a positive but insignificant effect on employees' performance. Therefore work progress feedback should be specific so as to enable employees address a specific area and that managers should avoid making vague generalizations when providing feedback. The findings also demonstrated that specificity of work progress feedback was crucial in terms of being well detailed and accurate and that managers should improve mechanisms on work progress feedback as it is directly linked to employees' performance.

The study also established that work progress feedback has an effect on employees' loyalty towards their organization which eventually ends up creating loyal customers due to increased customer satisfaction. Specificity of work progress feedback has an effect on employees' performance when delivered in specific and clear language without any vagueness. This has an effect of ensuring that employees are not left guessing on what is expected of them but will be able to clearly understand the way things are expected of them.

Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, a number of recommendations can be made. To start with, the

study findings clearly show that water and sanitation companies have work progress feedback mechanism though inadequate. Out of these findings, this study recommends that a review of work progress feedback be done in the departments to incorporate input from concerned parties.

Further the findings revealed that timeliness and mode of work progress feedback have a positive and significant effect on employees' performance. Following these findings, this study recommends that the water and sanitation companies should put more emphasis on offering work progress feedback in time using appropriate modes. This study recommends that the companies should have policies in place that will structure how employees who perform exceptionally well can be rewarded. Work progress feedback was found to have positive effect on employees' performance, it is on this basis that the researcher recommends that work progress feedback be provided to employees on a regular basis to enable them to know how to change what they are doing poorly and keep doing what they are doing well. Timely work progress feedback will ensure that issues are sorted out as and when they arise and hence contribute positively to employees' performance. This will make it possible for alternative solutions to be sought as well as avoiding unnecessary delays and losses of time, resources and skills.

Specificity of work progress feedback that is delivered in specific and clear language without any vagueness will ensure that employees are not left guessing on what is expected of them but will be able to clearly understand the way things are expected of them. The study recommends that work progress feedback should be accurate and to the point without leaving any shades of doubt. This will require proper analysis of issues before giving work progress feedback otherwise it may fail to achieve the intended purpose.

In consideration of employees' feelings, emotions, opinions and affections that are unique to each employee; work progress feedback should be given in a manner that respects human dignity without causing negative side effects to the employees. That wherever possible the managers should be open to alternative approaches, be allies rather than critics and should see employees as part and parcel of their success. There should be established formal systems of communication in the companies spelling out the means through which exchange of information, suggestions can be done. The employees should be given sufficient information to enable them do their jobs effectively.

The study recommends that managers/supervisors should not only criticize performance but be ready to provide constructive and sufficient work progress feedback to help correct anomalies. That they should also interact more with

their employees and keep offering appropriate work progress feedback. In order to have improved performance, productivity and increased customer satisfaction the employees have to continually be provided with work progress feedback. That managers should actively solicit employee inputs, act on them, give feedback, appreciate employees for jobs well done, recognize their contribution and appreciate their roles in achievements of organizational goals and objectives.

The study also recommends that the companies need to engage more with their employees in order to maximize their potential as this will lead to increased customer satisfaction and employees output. That work progress feedback should be given through interactive and participatory sessions where managers /supervisors and the employees are able to share with one another and hence coming up with an agreed course of action. This can be done on, one to one, through regular meetings, team building, and performance appraisal sessions among other alternatives.

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