

American Journal of Communication (AJC)



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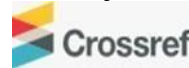
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Communication Strategies Used in Performance Contracting in the County Government of Nakuru, Kenya

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Article History

Submitted 18.12.23; Revised Version Received 21.1.23; Accepted 22.12.23

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to assess the communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting for employees within the county government of Nakuru.

Materials and Methods: This study used mixed research design. This research design was appropriate for this study as data collected was both quantitative and qualitative. The target population was representatives of the different departments of the County Government of Nakuru employees working in the headquarters. The study population consisted of 656 members of staff working within the headquarters of Nakuru County Government. The study used stratified random sampling to sample 80 staff members working both the managerial and subordinate level of the departments within the county government of Nakuru headquarters. Primary information was used in the study. During data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative data were analysed. Qualitative information was filtered and the main words in conversations tabulated for analysis using SPSS. Inferential statistics used visual tools such as graphs and pie charts to make inferences of the entire population. Frequencies, mean and percentages were also used to summarize the data. This gave visual representation of the data collected.

Findings: Regression of coefficients showed that communication strategies used in the process of

performance contracting had a positive and significant effect with productivity of Nakuru county government employees ($\beta=0.691$, $p=0.000$).

Conclusions: The study concluded that the county government of Nakuru frequently used emails, discussions, trainings as well as small meetings to communicate with the employees. However, the county government rarely used employee recognition and awards to communicate with their employees. Besides many other things the communication within the county helps the employees to perform their tasks well; to have information about the duties they have to perform, and about the goals of the organization. The study also concluded that communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting had a positive and significant effect with productivity of Nakuru county government employees.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: The county government of Nakuru should develop its own media like a local radio station, publication or TV station as these could help improve strategic communications. In addition, the county government should introduce employee recognition and awards as a channel of effectively communicate with their employees.

Keywords: *Communication Strategies, Performance Contracting, County Government*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Effective organizational communication helps the employees gather important information about their organization. Meaningful communication acts as an educational and motivational tool for the employees. It informs them of the organization's strategy and motivates them to achieve it. Effective internal communication within the organization is a key component for employee engagement and satisfaction. Good communication strategies are crucial in achieving employee productivity within the organization. Accordingly, employees' performance is regarded in terms of how employees are able to execute their duties in their organization. communicating clearly the performance standards and expectations as well as providing feedback, and conducting evaluations enable one to achieve the best results in managing employee performance (Femi 2014).

A good communication system acts as a bridge between the managers and the employees. By communicating purposefully, organization can spawn solid results. An organization therefore should have a clear communication strategy which focuses on results and relationships. Ryerson (2003) defines communication strategy as a plan to shape the opinions of an organization's key audiences and influence a reputation to advance the business objectives and safeguard the goodwill towards the brand. A communication strategy focuses on what the communication process wants to achieve and ways to be used to achieve that target. Therefore, a communication strategy should be characterized by patent goals and facilitated by clear channels. Further, a communication strategy must also ensure that the employees are given the information they require with no information overload (Sarpong, 2012).

Performance contracting is used to enhance workers' performance. Workers Performance is evaluated in accordance to how well an employee is able to execute his/her duties to the specified organisational Setting and clearly communicating performance standards that are set by the organisation. It also entails understanding expectations, observing/providing feedback, and conducting appraisals enable the organisation achieve the best results through managing employee performance (Asamu, 2014).

A performance contract is a mutual agreement between an organization, government and individuals outlining the obligations of each party (Greiling, 2006). In a bid to reform the public sector, the government introduced performance contracting. It entails setting of goals and targets for employees which are used to measure their productivity. Even with these efforts, there need to be proper communication frameworks that will allow smooth flow of information. It will entail communicating to the employees of what they are supposed to do as well as get the required feedback through various assessment strategies. Obong'o (2009) notes that Performance management aims at achieving operational effectiveness, which in a wider sense refers to several practices that allow an organization to make use of its resources well and generate desired outcome. Kenya has 47 counties which are headed by elected governors. Each county is an independent entity which has its unique workforce. As such there is need to have the right systems in place in order to manage these employees. As such, performance contracting can be very useful in county governments as a management process in order to enhance employee performance. Performance contracting should be driven through effective communication in an effort to realize productivity. The study specifically focused on investigating the communication strategy used in performance contracting in the county government of Nakuru.

Problem Statement

Communication is a key element in implementation of performance contracting in modern day organizations. Performance contracting process requires execution using proper communication strategies in order to make it effective. Poor communication strategies in performance contracting can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between the different stakeholders. The government of Kenya has incorporated performance contracting in most of its agencies including county governments as a way of improving productivity. Various studies have focused on the processes and the usefulness of performance contracting. However, little focus has been put on communication strategies in the performance contracting process. In performance contracting, most organizations do not incorporate communication as a tool to make the entire process effective. This study therefore sought to assess the communication strategies that have been used in performance contracting in Nakuru county Government.

Objectives of the Study

The study objective was to assess the communication strategies used in performance contracting within the county government of Nakuru.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW Empirical Literature

Every organization requires well executed communication strategies in order to achieve the set objectives. This is because communication plays a critical role in both small and large organizations. According to Melo and Goncalves (2019), it is through communicating purposefully that solid results can be generated. This standpoint depicts communication strategy as a wellcrafted plan aimed at achieving set communication objectives. It is through proper communication that a bridge is created between the employers and the employees. Therefore, communication strategies directly affect the goals and the output of the organization.

An open communication environment creates trust which is a key facet in achieving organizational success (Struckman, 2018). Further, the communication strategy should be inclusive such that all employees feel that they are involved in making the decisions that affect them. Lack of inclusivity can bring up a selective communication environment through which some members can feel like they are shut out since they would not see the value of their contribution in the company. This ultimately leads to lack of motivation among key players within the organization. As such, the strategies should be aimed at creating an open communication environment through which every stakeholder within the organization feels free to communicate and share feedback at all levels.

According to Oliveira, Melo and Goncalves (2019) good communication strategies in organizations include several steps. The first one is identifying and analyzing the target audience. Understanding the audience helps the communicator compose an appropriate message. The second step entails putting in place the communication objectives that one would want to achieve at the end of the communication process. The other step is message development whereby the message is composed to meet the needs of the communicator. The next step is putting in place dissemination strategies through identifying suitable communication channels through which information can be disseminated. Another key step is measurement and evaluation. This is a feedback collection step aimed at evaluating whether the communication process has met the set objectives. In order to

achieve successful communication in organizations, this communication structure should be maintained.

Having effective communication strategies in organization is a necessary step towards achieving organizational success. Communication strategies should be two- way such that they allow flow of information from top to bottom and vice versa. Listening to what the employees have to say is very much important since their input may change the fortunes of the organization. Managers should always engage their employees in order to create an active business environment. Another characteristic of effective communication strategy is that it should be results oriented. According to Reddy (2019), the communication should be strategic through focusing on measurable results. Therefore, employers should inform their employees of what they need to know about their jobs as well as being keen to listen to listen to them.

Effective communication strategies allow communication to take place multiple times and through diverse ways. Therefore, organization communication should be multi channeled in order to have positive impact. Every situation may require a different means of communication since employee communication needs and preferences differ. Therefore, using multiple communication channels such as face-to-face communication, video conferencing, telephones and written documents for different audiences increases the chances that communication messages are received and properly understood. Apart from using multiple channels, organizational communication may be improved through repeating important messages. This ensures that there is emphasis created on important kind of information. The organization should also ensure that the employee gets information that could have been communicated when the employee was away.

Communication in organizations should be strategic and should be handled in a professional manner. This is because the growth of organizations solely depends on factors such as dedicated employees and proper decision making which are facilitated by proper communication. The above discussed factors if properly implemented ensure that effective communication is achieved in organizations. Achieving desired results is possible when proper communication strategies are employed in organizations. **Theoretical Framework**

This study was informed by Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy. This theory has greatly influenced the running of organizations. Weber is a widely respected management theorist who is considered as the father of organizational studies. His bureaucratic theory makes an attempt to define organizational structure and give meaning to organizational processes within an organization (Anderson, 2007). He believed that organizations should be run in bureaucratic way an aspect that has widely used in modern day organizations. Miller (2015) notes the six major facets of bureaucracy as highlighted by Weber in his theory.

The first aspect is a clearly defined hierarchy whereby one establishes bosses who give orders to junior employees. According to Weber, the communication should start from the top management and then flow to the employees. With bureaucracy there is no chance for confusion in the messages being sent from the top to bottom and hence organizations have rigid machine-like systems where each employee contributes by way of well-defined and unambiguous roles (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Another facet outlined in this theory is division of labor. This is what every employee is supposed to do. He proposes that employee should be assigned a role that he/she is responsible for. With clearly defined roles each employee is well informed of what is expected of them. Weberian theory gives a place of prominence to abilities and the way organizations work is by delegating responsibilities according to capabilities of employees

Another facet highlighted in this theory is closed systems. A closed system ensures that an organization received minimal interruptions from the external environment since such environmental interruptions could hinder smooth functioning of the organization. A bureaucracy system also proposes a functioning authority. According to Weber an organization should function under a system of authority and discipline. Orders from higher authorities within the organization should be followed by the members of the organization in the lower ranks.

The theory also proposes importance of rules in the running of organizations in order to enhance discipline. Weber proposed that there should be rules for all possible contingencies in the organization which are rationally established. Finally, he proposed centralization in organizations which is distributing what employees are responsible for.

Weber further indicates that there are three possible grounds for authority which include traditional authority, charismatic authority and rational-legal authority. Traditional authority is authority based on long standing beliefs of who should have what power with each employee having different set of power. Charismatic authority is power based on individuals' personality and influence. It also includes their ability to interact with their followers. Lastly rational-legal authority is power based on rules based on reliance on expertise. Power doesn't rest with individuals but in the expertise that has created a system of rules (Miller, 2015). This theory therefore will be helpful in this study since it proposes that employees should be given clear instructions by their managers for them to execute their duties well. Clear instructions are vital in performance contracting since employees will be aware of what they are supposed to do.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used mixed research design. This research design was appropriate for this study as data collected was both quantitative and qualitative. The target population was representatives of the different departments of the County Government of Nakuru employees working in the headquarters. The study population consisted of 656 members of staff working within the headquarters of Nakuru County Government. The study used stratified random sampling to sample 80 staff members working both the managerial and subordinate level of the departments within the county government of Nakuru headquarters. Primary information was used in the study. During data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed. Qualitative information was filtered and the main words in conversations tabulated for analysis using SPSS. Inferential statistics used visual tools such as graphs and pie charts to make inferences of the entire population. Frequencies, mean and percentages were also used to summarize the data. This gave visual representation of the data collected.

4.0 FINDINGS Descriptive Statistics

The data was collected from the respondents who were requested to indicate their levels of agreement to various communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting by county government, using a five point Likert scale. The data was further grouped, with 4 & 5 being grouped as agree, 1 & 2 being classified as disagree while 3 was indicated as neutral.

Table 1: Communication Strategies Used

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
The county government of Nakuru often communicates instructions to employees on what they are supposed to do.	4.30%	8.70%	8.70%	71.00%	7.20%	3.68	0.90
The management team follows up to see whether I have met the targets they set for me.	2.90%	7.20%	29.00%	46.40%	14.50%	3.62	0.93
Nakuru county government uses communication methods to motivate the employees	2.90%	14.50%	24.60%	49.30%	8.70%	3.46	0.95
There are proper communication channels for employees to give their feedback to the management	4.30%	18.80%	8.70%	63.80%	4.30%	3.45	0.99

Source: Research Data (2023)

The results showed that majority of the respondents who were 78.2% agreed with the statement that the county government of Nakuru often communicates instructions to employees on what they are supposed to do (Mean=3.68, std.dev=0.90). This implied that there was effective communication between the county managers and county employees. The study findings agreed with Sara (2018) who indicated that employees often need clear instructions in order to understand the duties they are expected to perform. The study findings agreed with Dawkins (2004) who indicated that effective internal communication can ensure that the employees are productive, an aspect that is crucial in ensuring corporate reputation and credibility. Employees are regarded as the face of the company since they are viewed as credible sources by external stake holders.

Further results showed that majority of the respondents who were 60.9% agreed with the statement that the management team follows up to see whether they have met the targets they set for them (Mean=3.62, std.dev=0.93). This implied that the county management of Nakuru make up follow ups on employees' targets. The study findings agreed with Pollock (2018) who indicated that organizations should set achievable targets which employees should strive to achieve. The study findings agreed with Sila (2018) negotiations before signing contracts were lacking and employees were not motivated by setting achievable targets by appraising them quarterly with feedback from supervisors.

In addition, results showed that majority of the respondents who were 58.0% agreed with the statement that Nakuru county government uses communication methods to motivate the employees (Mean=3.46, std.dev=0.95). This implied that that though Nakuru County used communication methods to motivate their county employees was not to a very large extent. These study findings agreed with Riku and Perrot (2008) who indicated that communication ensures that the employees are motivated to work in achieving the set goals.

Further results showed that majority of the respondents who were 60.9% agreed with the statement that there were proper communication channels for employees to give their feedback to the management (Mean=3.45, std.dev=0.99). This meant that the communication channels in Nakuru

county government were effective to give the management feedback. The study findings agreed with Struckman (2018) who indicted that communication strategies should be aimed at creating an open communication environment through which every stakeholder within the organization feels free to communicate and share feedback at all levels. The study findings agreed with Kemboi (2016) who found out that there is a link between performance contracting and employee commitment. The study also found out that employee commitment positively affected their performance. The study findings also agreed with Hagemann (2018) who also indicated that new information and communication played a great role on productivity of employees.

From the interview guides, the respondents were further asked to indicate how they communicate the importance of performance contracting to employees. Most of the respondents indicated that they communicate the importance of performance contracting through field administrators who are the sub county administrators who disseminate information to the county employees. The county administrators also hold small committees with the county employees so as they can cascade their resolutions with the employees. The findings agreed with Letangule (2012) who found that performance contracting enables the management remain in touch with their employees. The study findings agreed with Heathfield (2018) who indicated that meetings play a crucial role in ensuring that set goals and objectives are achieved. Such meetings facilitate follow up on peer - reviews recognize the team members who have met their goals and objectives.

The respondents were further asked to indicate whether they involve the employees when setting quantifiable targets for them. The respondents indicated that Nakuru county government involves the employees when setting quantifiable targets for them. The study findings agreed with Pollock (2018) who indicated that organizations should set achievable targets which employees should strive to achieve. The study findings agreed with Sila (2018) negotiations before signing contracts were lacking and employees were not motivated by setting achievable targets by appraising them quarterly with feedback from supervisors.

The respondents were further asked to indicate the communication structures that they had put in place to ensure smooth flow of information between them and the employees. Some of the communication structures that were indicated included; written communication, forums, emails, printed guidelines and regular trainings. The study findings agreed with Jo and Shim (2005) who indicated that communication structures ensured there is a smooth flow of information within the organization. This implied that Nakuru county government was able to use emails effectively. The study findings agreed with Hamadziripi (2019) who indicated that most communication used in modern day organizations is mediated through computer. For instance, emails have been adopted in organizations as an official way of sending and receiving messages. The study findings agreed with Dawkins (2004) who indicated that effective internal communication can ensure that the employees are productive an aspect that is crucial in ensuring corporate reputation and credibility. Employees are regarded as the face of the company since they are viewed as credible sources by external stake holders.

Employee Productivity within the County Government

The data was collected from the respondents who were requested to indicate their levels of agreement to employee productivity within the county government of Nakuru, using a five- point

Likert scale. The data was further grouped, with 4 & 5 being grouped as agree, 1 & 2 being classified as disagree while 3 was indicated as neutral.

Table 2: Employee Productivity Within the County Government of Nakuru

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev</u>
I am able to perform my duties to the best of my abilities	2.90%	4.30%	8.70%	79.70%	4.30%	3.78	0.72
I have a good relationship with my managers.	0.00%	8.70%	15.90%	71.00%	4.30%	3.71	0.69
I am able to perform duties without seeking follow up information. I am able to give my contribution to the general productivity of organisation through giving my feedback.	2.90%	8.70%	14.50%	65.20%	8.70%	3.68	0.87
The set targets help you as a county government employee become more productive in <u>discharging your duties.</u>	4.30%	10.10%	13.00%	47.80%	24.60%	3.78	1.07
	<u>1.40%</u>	<u>10.10%</u>	<u>20.30%</u>	<u>36.20%</u>	<u>31.90%</u>	<u>3.87</u>	<u>1.03</u>

Source: Research Data (2023)

The results showed that majority of the respondents who were 84.0% agreed with the statement that they are able to perform their duties to the best of their abilities (mean=3.78, std.dev=0.72). This implied that the Nakuru county employees were productive. The study further agreed with Sadia et al. (2016) who indicated that the organizational communication improved employee productivity.

The results further showed that majority of the respondents who were 75.3% agreed with the statement that they had a good relationship with their managers (mean=3.71, std.dev=0.69). This implied that the Nakuru county employees had good relations with their county managers. The study findings were also consistent with Solaja, Idowu and James (2016) who focused on exploring the relationship between leadership communication style, personality trait and organizational productivity and demonstrated a combined impact of personality characteristics and communication styles on organizational productivity.

In addition, results showed that majority of the respondents who were 73.9% agreed with the statement that they are able to perform duties without seeking follow up information (mean=3.68, std.dev=0.87). This implied that the Nakuru county employees were able to work effectively without follow ups from the county managers. The results further showed that majority of the respondents who were 72.4% agreed with the statement that they are able to give their contribution to the general productivity of organization through giving their feedback (mean=3.78, std.dev=1.07). This implied that the Nakuru county employees were able to give their contribution to the county government. In addition, results showed that majority of the respondents who were

73.9% agreed with the statement that the set targets helped them as a county government employee become more productive in discharging their duties (mean=3.87, std.dev=1.03). This implied that Nakuru county government was able to set targets that enables the county employees to be more productive. The study findings agreed with Krishantha (2018) who indicated that employing the right communication strategies in organization is key to ensuring that employees remain productive.

From the interview guide, the respondents were further asked to indicate the aspects they used to gauge the productivity of their employees. The respondents indicated that they used county directors to gauge the output per worker. Other measures of employee productivity in the county included the quality of work done by the employees as well as conducting annual performance reviews. The study findings agreed with Hassan and Ndegwa (2019) who focused on motivation and employees performance in county assembly of Mandera, Kenya and measured employee productivity by use of quality of work performed and timeliness to complete a task.

Inferential Results

Regression analysis was one of the inferential statistics used to show the relationship between variables. It showed the impact communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting on the productivity of Nakuru county government employees. Regression results were presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Model Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.683a	0.467	0.459	0.50152

Source: Research Data (2023)

Results showed that the R was 0.683. This implies that communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting had a strong positive correlation with productivity of Nakuru county government employees. The study therefore agreed with Martinez and Hurtado (2018) who established that poor communication strategies affected the productivity of employees negatively. In addition, the R square was 0.467. This infers that communication strategies explain 68.3% of the variations in the dependent variable which was productivity of Nakuru county government employees. The study findings agreed with Solaja, Idowu and James (2016) focused on exploring the relationship between leadership communication style, personality trait and organizational productivity and found that the effectiveness of a leader's communication style affects an organization's efficiency. The study findings agreed with Kemboi (2016) who found out that there is a link performance contracting and employee commitment. The study also found out that employee commitment positively affected their performance. The study findings also agreed with Hagemann (2018) who also indicated that new information and communication played a great role on productivity of employees

To determine the communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting as a predictor for productivity of Nakuru county government employees the ANOVA was computed. Table 4 provides the results on the analysis of the variance (ANOVA).

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	14.744	1	14.744	58.619	.000b
Residual	16.852	67	0.252		
Total	31.597	68			

Source: Research Data (2023)

Table 4 indicated that communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting were a good predictor of productivity of Nakuru county government employees as represented by an F statistic of 58.619 and the reported p value of 0.000, which was less than the conventional probability of 0.05 significance level. This implies that the communication strategies have statistically significant effect on productivity of Nakuru county government employees at a 95% confidence level. The study further agreed with Sadia et al. (2016) who indicated that the organizational communication with employed productivity. The study findings were also consistent with Solaja, Idowu and James (2016) who focused on exploring the relationship between leadership communication style, personality trait and organizational productivity and demonstrated a combined impact of personality characteristics and communication styles on organizational productivity.

Regressions of coefficient results were presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression of Coefficient Standardized

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.308	0.327		4.007	0.000
Communication strategies	0.691	0.09	0.683	7.656	0.000

Source: Research Data (2023)

Regression of coefficients showed that communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting had a positive and significant effect with productivity of Nakuru county government employees ($\beta=0.691$, $p=0.000$). This implied that an improvement in communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting by one unit would improve productivity of Nakuru county government employees by 0.691 units. The study findings agreed with Kemboi (2016) who found out that there is a link performance contracting and employee commitment. The study also found out that employee commitment positively affected their performance. The study findings also agreed with Hagemann (2018) who also indicated that new information and communication played a great role on productivity of employees.

$$Y = 1.308 + 0.691X$$

Y= Productivity of Nakuru county government employees

X= communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS Conclusions

The study concluded that the county government of Nakuru frequently used emails, discussions, trainings as well as small meetings to communicate with the employees. However, the county government rarely used employee recognition and awards to communicate with their employees. Besides many other things the communication within the county helps the employees to perform their tasks well; to have information about the duties they have to perform, and about the goals of the organization. The study also concluded that communication strategies used in the process of performance contracting had a positive and significant effect with productivity of Nakuru county government employees.

Recommendations

This study proposes a number of recommendations based on the findings. The first recommendation of the study is that the county government of Nakuru should develop its own media like a local radio station, publication or TV station as these could help improve strategic communications. The second recommendation suggests that the county management should align its own organizational structure to what the strategy is calling for in order to enhance effectiveness of communication and coordination during the implementation process. This can be done by adoption of decentralized organization structures which encourages employee participation with clear lines of communication to boost employee's performance and sustain organizational competitiveness.

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