



EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE COUNSELLING PROGRAMS ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE OF TEA FACTORIES IN KERICHO COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

In today's dynamic work environment, employee well-being has become a significant concern for organizations aiming to enhance employee productivity and retain talent. Organizations have recently focused on employee development practices through more innovative approaches to achieve that. Employee development practices comprise a range of initiatives designed to improve employee performance, productivity, and job satisfaction while also preparing individuals for future roles and responsibilities within the company. Employee development practices, particularly employee counselling programs, offer confidential support to employees struggling to manage personal or work-related challenges. This paper investigated the effect of employee counselling programs on employee performance in tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya. It drew its theory from the Social Exchange Theory. It employed a descriptive research design, targeting a population of 133 employees from all management levels across different functional departments in 14 tea factories in Kericho County using structured questionnaires. Correlation analysis revealed that employee counselling programs affect employee performance of tea factories in Kericho county ($r = 0.366$, $p = 0.000$), $R^2 = 0.134$, showing that employee counselling alone can explain approximately 13% of the variance in employee performance. The regression model further revealed a strong relationship between employee counselling and employee performance ($\beta = 0.205$, $p = 0.003$). The findings indicated a positive and statistically significant effect that employee counselling programs have on employee performance of tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya. It further recommended that organizations regularly review the effectiveness of these counselling programs and make necessary adjustments to align them with employee mental and emotional well-being and organizational goals.

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1. Introduction

In today's dynamic work environment, employee well-being has become a pivotal concern for organizations aiming to enhance employee productivity and retain talent. Employee development practices consist of strategic initiatives designed to enhance employee skills, knowledge, and capabilities, ultimately contributing to improved organizational performance (Mohanad & Ibrahim, 2019). Such practices include training programs, mentorship and coaching, performance management, counselling programs, career development plans, leadership development, soft skills development, workshops and seminars, online learning platforms, employee engagement and on-the-job training. These practices directly enhance the skills and knowledge of employees, making them more competent and efficient in their roles, often leading to improved productivity, higher quality of work, and greater innovation (Purwanto, 2021).

Employee counselling has been increasingly identified as an important organizational tool to enhance employees' well-being and performance. In developed countries like the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, counselling is offered through structured employee assistance programs (EAPs), which support employees in dealing with personal and work-related challenges. Research by Srivastava and Pathak (2020) in India suggested that workplace counselling positively impacts motivation and stress reduction. In Africa, research by Chima *et al.* (2023) highlighted the importance of employers integrating counselling services within healthcare settings to enhance overall performance in Malawi.

Employee counselling programs, primarily associated with Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), serve as vital tools in addressing the psychological and emotional needs of employees working in an organization. These programs address personal and professional challenges that may affect an employee's performance (Rachmawati *et al.*, 2022). Employee counselling programs have become integral to organizational strategies globally, addressing the multifaceted well-being of employees. They offer confidential support to employees struggling to manage personal or work-related challenges, fostering a healthier and more engaged workforce, enhancing overall productivity and job satisfaction (Rosado, 2024).

This paper investigated the effect of employee counselling services on employee performance of tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya. The following hypothesis was tested:

H0: There is no statistically significant effect of employee counselling programs on employee performance of tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Social Exchange Theory, developed by sociologist George C. Homans in the 1950s and further expanded by Peter M. Blau, is a cornerstone in social psychology and sociology (Cross & Dundon, 2019). The theory offers a lens through which we can comprehend the intricate dynamics of human interactions, relationships, and the underlying motivations that drive them. This theory emerged within the broader context of structural-functionalism and sought to unravel the complex tapestry of social behaviour by delving into the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit (Davis-Sramek *et al.*, 2022). The origins of Social Exchange Theory can be traced back to the mid-20th century, when George C. Homans introduced it as an attempt to explain how individuals navigate social interactions based on calculated evaluations of rewards and costs (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018). Blau later contributed to the theory's development by emphasizing the role of social structure and its effect on exchanges.

At its core, Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals engage in relationships and interactions with the expectation of receiving rewards or benefits while aiming to minimize costs. These rewards can encompass a broad spectrum, including emotional support, material resources, companionship, or opportunities for advancement (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018). The theory assumes that individuals are rational actors who assess their interactions' potential gains and losses (Davis-Sramek *et al.*, 2022). It underscores the importance of creating a supportive work environment where employees feel valued and understood. When employees perceive that their managers acknowledge their contributions and that the factories are invested in their growth, they are more likely to engage in positive reciprocal interactions.

This theory is relevant in examining the effect of employee counselling programs on employee performance in tea factories. Within the organizational context, counselling can be viewed as an interaction wherein both parties – the employee and the organization – anticipate rewards and benefits. Employees who perceive that the organization is invested in providing counselling as support and assistance may reciprocate by investing more effort, commitment, and loyalty into their roles. This theory helps managers identify the areas where employees need support most regarding counselling to encourage them to perform better. Positive counselling experiences can contribute to heightened well-being and job satisfaction, fostering a positive exchange dynamic.

2.2 Empirical Review

A study by Tiwari and Shrivasta (2021) was conducted in India to assess the influence of workplace counselling on employee productivity and job satisfaction. The researchers employed a descriptive research design and gathered data using structured questionnaires distributed among employees across various organizations. Their analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between access to counselling services and improved employee performance indicators like attendance and employee cooperation.

The study highlighted that workplace counselling provides employees an effective coping mechanism to deal with stress, personal issues and workplace challenges. The findings emphasize the value of integrating employee counselling as a strategic tool of human resource management to foster a supportive and productive workplace environment.

Similarly, Ajala *et al.* (2016) investigated the effect of employee assistance programmes on workers' performance in selected work organizations in Ondo and Edo states, Nigeria. The study investigated the influence of various employee assistance programs (EAPs), including counselling, stress management, supervisory and conflict management programs, on the performance of their employees. It involved 360 employees from selected organizations in Ondo and Edo states. Findings showed that while counselling programs alone did not have a significant effect on performance ($r = -0.124$, $p > 0.05$), stress management ($r = 0.593$, $p < 0.05$), supervisory ($r = 0.645$, $p < 0.05$) and conflict management ($r = 0.679$, $p < 0.05$) positively affect performance. The combined effect of all four programs accounted for 55.1% of the variance in the performance of their workers.

A study by Chepkirui (2021) in Bomet County, Kenya, examined the role of employee counselling on staff performance in health institutions. The research adopted a case study approach with questionnaires and interviews from healthcare workers and management. The findings revealed that counselling services played a critical role in reducing workplace stress among staff, which is a common challenge in health settings due to the demanding nature of the work. Furthermore, the study found that counselling improved teamwork by fostering better employee communication and understanding. This enhanced collaboration positively impacted patient care and operational efficiency. In addition, counselling helped improve compliance with safety protocols, reducing workplace accidents and promoting a safer working environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The descriptive research design was highly applicable. This paper aimed to examine the effect of employee counselling programs on employee performance in tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya. Using a descriptive research design, the researchers can systematically gather information about employee counselling programs and employee performance levels within the tea factories. This design allowed them to describe and analyze the various aspects of employee development practices and their effect on performance, providing a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population is a crucial element in research methodology, representing the entire group of individuals or objects from which the researcher aims to conclude (Alvi, 2016). Kericho County is renowned for its lush tea plantations. The target population consisted of 133 employees from all levels of management- top, middle and lower across various functional departments that include finance, operations, production, Quality Management (QM), and Human Resources (HR).

Stratified random sampling is a probability sampling technique that involves dividing the total population into smaller groups or strata based on shared attributes or characteristics, from which random samples are selected (Taherdoost, 2016). This method was particularly suitable for this paper, given the heterogeneous nature of the target population across different management categories and functions within the tea factories. The sample size selected was 100 employees. There was a response rate of 94% (94 respondents). The study targeted 14 factories to reflect the variety of management types in the tea sector. It prioritized factories under KTDA, private medium-scale enterprises, and multinationals with a direct local management structure.

3.3 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale measured employee counselling programs, focusing on work-related stress, work-life balance, conflict resolution, job satisfaction, and mental well-being. The closed-ended questionnaire assessed employee performance based on task completion, attendance, safety, and teamwork. The study applied construct, content, and external validity. Reliability assessment involved Cronbach's Alpha. It employed analytical techniques to summarise the data, with descriptive statistics covering the mean and standard deviation. The study also applied Pearson correlation (r) and multiple linear regression. Inferential statistics enabled the comparison and evaluation of variables at significance levels (Siedlecki, 2020). Additionally, the diagnostic tests for inferential statistics involved normality, multicollinearity test, autocorrelation, and homoscedasticity.

4. Results

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed, of which 94 were duly completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 94.0%. This rate meets the threshold for adequacy in research according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Effect of Employee Counselling on Employee Performance

Respondents were asked to rate the employee counselling programs. Counselling programs provide vital support that helps employees manage workplace challenges and improve well-being, directly affecting employee performance.

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics on employee counselling programs

Counseling Index		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean (x̄)	Standard Deviation (S)
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1.	Counselling sessions have helped reduce work-related stress.	13	13.8	2	2.1	26	27.7	33	35.1	20	21.3	3.48	1.251
2.	Counselling support improves the ability to manage work-life balance.	12	12.8	5	5.3	20	21.3	31	33.0	26	27.7	3.57	1.299
3.	Counselling sessions are practical in resolving conflicts among colleagues.	7	7.4	16	17.0	37	39.4	28	29.8	6	6.4	3.11	1.010
4.	Work-related counselling enhances overall job satisfaction.	21	22.3	25	26.6	7	7.4	18	19.1	23	24.5	2.97	1.534
5.	Counselling sessions positively impact mental state at work.	19	20.2	23	24.5	14	14.9	20	21.3	18	19.1	2.95	1.432
Overall mean												3.12	0.776

The findings in Table 4.1 show that a majority of employees perceive "Counselling sessions help reduce work-related stress" with 33 (35.1%) agreeing and 20 (21.3%) strongly agreeing. However, 13 (13.8%) strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.48 and standard deviation of 1.251 suggest that while most employees in the tea factories found counselling sessions beneficial in reducing stress, a key factor influencing concentration, safety and productivity, some did not report significant improvements. Regarding "Counselling support improves the ability to manage work-life balance," had a mean score of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 1.299, with 31 (33.0%) of respondents agreeing, while 26 (27.7%) strongly agreed. This indicates that counselling has positively affected employees' ability to handle personal and professional responsibilities, which supports better attendance and teamwork.

The statement "Counselling sessions are effective in resolving conflicts among colleagues" received mixed responses, with 28 (29.8%) agreeing. In comparison, 37 (39.4%) remained neutral, with a mean score of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 1.010, suggesting moderate agreement and less variability. Effective conflict resolution contributes directly to improved teamwork and collaboration. The statement "Work-

related counselling enhances overall job satisfaction" recorded the lowest mean of 2.97 and SD of 1.534, suggesting mixed responses. 18 (19.1%) agreed, 23 (24.5%) strongly agreed, and 25 (26.6%) disagreed. This aspect is critical despite the variability because job satisfaction affects employee retention, performance and attendance. Lastly, the statement "Counseling sessions positively impact mental state at work" had a mean score of 2.95 and SD of 1.432, with 20 (21.3%) agreeing and 18 (19.1%) strongly agreeing. They suggest that mental health is closely linked to safety, focus and overall performance.

These results suggest that employee counselling programs improve employee performance by reducing stress, resolving conflicts, enhancing job satisfaction and supporting employees' mental health, thereby fostering better task completion, attendance, workplace safety and teamwork within the tea factories. These findings align with several empirical studies. For instance, Okoye and Eze (2020) reported that counselling significantly reduced absenteeism and workplace conflicts. Attridge (2022) demonstrated that employee assistance programs (EAPs) contributed to improved presenteeism and reduced missed work hours, underscoring the role of counselling in sustaining workforce productivity; another report by Attridge (2022) linked brief counselling to lower absence days and greater well-being. Similarly, Chepkirui (2021) revealed that counselling services played a vital role in reducing workplace stress among employees, especially in demanding environments, validating the relevance of counselling interventions in modern HR strategies.

4.2.2 Employee Performance

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics on Employee performance in tea factories

Employee Performance Index		0-20% (Very Poor)		21-40% (Poor)		41-60% (Fair)		61-80% (Good)		81-100% (Excellent)		Mean (x̄)	Standard Deviation (S)
		F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1.	Task Completion: How well do the employees in your factory complete assigned tasks on time to meet quality standards?	16	17.0	23	24.5	15	16.0	23	24.5	17	18.1	3.02	1.383
2.	Attendance: How consistent are the employees attending work and following shift schedules?	17	18.1	23	24.5	20	21.3	15	16.0	19	20.2	2.96	1.398
3.	Safety: How effectively do the employees follow	18	19.1	15	16.0	17	18.1	24	25.5	20	21.3	3.14	1.426

	workplace safety, hygiene, and operational procedures?												
4.	Teamwork: How well do the employees collaborate with colleagues and communicate with supervisors?	23	24.5	23	24.5	7	7.4	18	19.1	23	24.5	2.95	1.555

Regarding employee performance, 16 (17.0%) of respondents rated task completion as very poor, while 17 (18.1%) rated it as excellent. Most respondents were distributed across different performance levels, leading to a mean score of ($\bar{x} = 3.02$) and standard deviation ($S = 1.383$). This suggests that while some employees complete tasks effectively, others struggle with meeting deadlines.

Attendance, 17 (18.1%) of employees rated themselves at the lowest level, while 19 (20.2%) considered their attendance as excellent. The mean score of ($\bar{x}=2.96$ and standard deviation ($S = 1.398$) indicates that punctuality and adherence to work schedules vary among employees, with some maintaining consistency while others face challenges.

For safety, which measures adherence to workplace safety and hygiene regulations, 18 (19.1%) of employees rated their compliance as very poor, while 20 (21.3%) rated it as excellent. The mean score of ($\bar{x} = 3.14$) and standard deviation ($S = 1.426$) suggests a slightly above-average level of compliance, with some employees following safety procedures effectively while others require improvement.

Teamwork was another crucial factor assessed, with 23 (24.5%) of respondents giving it an abysmal rating, while an equal 23 (24.5%) rated it as excellent. The mean score of ($\bar{x}=2.95$) and standard deviation ($S = 1.555$) indicate that collaboration and communication skills vary significantly among employees, suggesting a need for enhanced teamwork initiatives.

4.2 Inferential Analysis

Employee counselling programs also show a moderate positive correlation with performance ($r = 0.366$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that employees in the tea factories who receive counselling support tend to perform better, likely due to reduced work-related stress and improved job satisfaction (Cooper & Cartwright, 2019). Normality assumption test, Employee counselling programs ($p = 0.040$) under the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated mixed results. The VIF and Tolerance values were used to test for multicollinearity (0.727 and 1.376). These results indicate the absence of multicollinearity among the predictor variables (Stock & Watson, 2011). Autocorrelation was tested using the Durbin-Watson statistic; a value of 2.004 was accepted since it falls within the acceptable range of approximately 1.5 to 2.5, indicating no significant autocorrelation. Homoscedasticity was examined visually using a scatterplot of residuals. The results

show that the residuals were randomly dispersed without any discernible pattern, suggesting that the variance of residuals is constant across levels of the predicted values.

The model indicated a relationship between employee counselling programs and employee performance, with an R value of 0.336. The R² value of 0.134 suggests that approximately 13% of the variance in employee performance can be explained by employee counselling alone. The adjusted R², slightly lower at 0.124, confirms that employee counselling programs significantly explain the variance in employee performance even after adjusting the number of predictors in the model. The standard error of estimate, 0.531, shows that the average distance of observed values falls from the regression line. The F-statistic is 14.273 with a corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. This shows that the model is statistically significant, and employee counselling significantly affects employee performance.

Employee counselling programs also have a positive and statistically significant impact on employee performance ($\beta = 0.205$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that employees who receive counselling program support tend to perform better. This aligns with studies showing that workplace counselling helps reduce stress and improve job satisfaction, leading to better performance (Cooper & Cartwright, 2019).

Regression analysis confirmed that counseling had a statistically significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.205$, $p = 0.003$). Since $p = 0.003 < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_{02} : There is no statistically significant effect of employee counseling programs on employee performance) was rejected, supporting the alternative hypothesis.

5. Summary, Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Results

Respondents generally perceived that counselling of employees positively affects employee performance, with a mean score and a standard deviation of $\bar{x} = 3.21$, $S = 0.698$. This reflects shared recognition of the value of counselling programs in improving employee well-being and effectiveness. The correlation analysis showed a moderate positive relationship between counselling and employee performance ($r = 0.366$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that counseling helps reduce work-related stress and enhances job satisfaction (Cooper & Cartwright, 2019).

Regression analysis confirmed this significance, with employee counseling accounting for approximately 13% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.134$, $R = 0.336$). The ANOVA results confirmed the model was statistically significant ($F = 14.273$, $p < 0.05$). The standardized beta coefficient was ($\beta = 0.205$, $p = 0.003$) with a t value 12.978. These results led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that employee counselling significantly positively affects employee performance in tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya.

5.2 Discussion of Results

The results showed that employee counselling significantly positively affected employee performance. Counselling is crucial in addressing employees' emotional and psychological challenges, enhancing their ability to focus, collaborate, and adhere to organizational standards such as attendance and safety. According to the social exchange theory, employees feel valued and reciprocate with increased commitment and productivity when organizations invest in counselling services. These results are consistent with studies by Tiwari and Shrivastava (2021), who found that workplace counselling significantly improved employee engagement and output in India and Okoye and Eze (2020), who observed positive impacts of counselling on organizational performance in Nigerian firms.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings indicate that employee counselling programs have a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance of tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya. With a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.205$), approximately 13% of the variance in employee performance is explained by counselling alone. The results highlight that when organizations address personal and professional challenges, including stress management, conflict resolution, and work-life balance counselling, employees tend to function more effectively in ways that support organizational goals. These include better attendance rate, stronger teamwork and improved task completion. Employees who perceive these programs as beneficial are likelier to exhibit positive employee performance outcomes because the support improves their mental and emotional well-being. Therefore, increasing investment in employee counselling is essential for tea factories aiming to enhance employee performance.

5.4 Recommendations

The paper recommended that management integrate structured counselling practices to address employees' emotional and psychological needs. These should include: stress management, conflict resolution, and work-life balance counselling. Counselling should be formally embedded in HR policies as a strategic tool to enhance employee well-being and organizational productivity. Policy makers should create guidelines and incentives to encourage adoption across the sector. Moreover, regular evaluation of these programs should ensure they remain aligned with employee needs and organizational goals, with adjustments made where necessary.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

The spectrum of employee development practices is broad and diverse, catering to various aspects of an employee's professional life. This study focused on employee counselling programs; another study could focus on other initiatives like mentorship and coaching, performance management, leadership development, soft skills development,

workshops and seminars, online learning platforms, employee engagement and on-the-job training in different sectors.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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