

## Effect of Sensitivity Training on Organizational Performance of North Rift Regional Bloc Counties, Kenya

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| Received: 03.08.2021 | Accepted: 07.09.2021 | Published: 14.09.2021

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### Abstract

### Original Research Article

Performance challenges in the counties include high levels of absenteeism, delays by county officials to address public issues and low quality services offered by the county staff. Efforts have been made to manage workforce diversities through a number of strategies but there are indications that these practices have not yielded expected performance results. Therefore, the aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between sensitivity training and organization performance of county governments in North Rift region of Kenya. The study also sought to determine the moderating effect of staff rationalization on the relationship between sensitivity training and performance. A correlational research design was used to assess the relationship between the variables. The study targeted the employees working in NOREB counties and customers. The employees in the 8 counties consisted of top and middle level management were represented by the members of County Executive Committees and Chief Officers while the middle management were the directors and heads of sections of different departments. The study targeted 1129 respondents and the sample size was 285 respondents. The study employed a stratified sampling method to collect the desired sample from the various sub-sets in the population. Purposive sampling was employed to pick the management staff from the respective departments at the county to ensure that all the departments at the county government are represented. Customers were picked using simple random sampling from different wards in the county. A questionnaire was administered to middle level staff working in the various departments who are the directors and the heads of sections. An interview schedule was administered to the heads of departments in the various departments and a different set of interview schedule to customers selected to participate in the study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data and regression was used to test the hypotheses. Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview data. The results of the moderated hierarchical regressions indicated that sensitivity training had a significant relationship ( $p = 0.001$ ) at 95 percent confidence level with organizational performance when moderated with Rationalization. The study concluded and recommended that content in sensitivity training needs to be relevant and current to assist solve organizational problems.

**Keywords:** Sensitivity Training, Organization Performance, North Rift, Counties, Kenya.

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## INTRODUCTION

Globalization and competition have led to increased heterogeneous workforce in organizations. In addition, technology advancement and globalized economy have brought people from diverse backgrounds closer to one another [1]. Therefore, the rising globalization demands greater networking among individuals from different demographic background. This has led to the phenomenon of workforce diversity. The workforce is defined as the totality of the people working in an organization [2]. Cho, Kim and Mor Barak [3] defines workforce diversity as the multitude of the individual differences and similarities that exist among the people working in an organization. This

perspective underlines a key issue concerning handling workforce diversity, namely that there exist varying perspectives or aspects of human resource diversity. As such, workforce diversity affects every person in the firm. It does not merely entail demographic features like age, ethnicity or gender [4]. Essentially, it incorporates all the personal differences and resemblances that render every employee unique. Subsequently, workforce diversity is not the same as the distinctions of the employees. It instead entails both distinctions and resemblances.

Managing workforce diversity involves tackling both aspects simultaneously [5]. Thus,

workforce diversity consists of the collective assortment of dissimilarities and resemblances of the employees. Tackling it demands that executives incorporate the collective distinctions and similarities. These two dimensions must be properly understood, determined and established [6]. Optimizing and exploiting on workplace diversity is a critical aspect for contemporary management and organization performance. Organizational performance is the extent to which a firm is achieving its goals and objectives [7]. Cascio [8] conceptualizes organizational performance as the extent to which a business is fulfilling the promises it has made to its stakeholders. As such, profit and charity firms require diversity to allow for creativity and positive change. Ali [9] opines that workforce diversity is a marketplace and a global phenomenon. As a result, any organization that intends to succeed must have a wider view and an underlying commitment to ensuring that workforce diversity is part of its business affairs. Diversity in labour force generates a multicultural workplace, conformity with obligatory requirements, and inclusion of diverse worldviews [10].

To enhance organizational performance through human resource practices such as workforce diversity management practices, Knights and Omanović [11] suggest the need for staff rationalization. Staff rationalization endeavours to cut expenses and raise effectiveness and output. It is a sort of planned elimination of positions or jobs whose primary purpose is to limit the work force. Hunt, Layton and Prince [12] note that staff rationalization is a critical factor if all departments in an organization are to operate efficiently. This paper operationalizes the term staff rationalization to include organization redesign plan that targets mainly the limiting work instead of the number of staff. It also encompasses tasks such as eliminating functions, some tiered levels (delaying), teams, and sections, products, restructuring tasks, combination and merger of segments.

According to Kyalo and Gachunga [13], Nigeria has experienced great change in labour force diversity. They observe that Nigerian firms exercise diversity across age and gender and more significantly in ethnicity and nationality. Bana, Guyo and Odhiambo [14] observe the same in Egypt noting that the workforce in the country is diverse in terms nationality and that many can speak Arabic in addition to foreign languages, including French, English and German.

The Kenyan labour force is growing rapidly. Thousands of young people are graduating each year. Older employees in civil service stay longer than usual in employment (retirement age increased from 55 to 60 years). Expanding number of female workers is plainly obvious. The government and the civil societies lobby for acknowledgment and incorporation of the disabled and previously unrepresented groups in work to

advance regional balance. The constitution of Kenya (2010) requires that businesses, both in public and private organizations, advance inclusiveness, reasonableness and equivalent open doors for all citizens regardless of their age, sex, inability, religion, ethnicity or social background, and that there ought to be fairness in sharing of national resources. Various government legislations and circulars direct much attention to the inclusion of people living with disabilities and members of minority and marginalized communities in formal employment. The Kenyan county governments face these similar challenges [15].

### Sensitivity Training

Ozeki [16] did a study on the impact of diversity training on commitment, career satisfaction and innovation. The purpose was to investigate the relationship between diversity training with organizational commitment, career satisfaction and innovation in the organization. The study sought to determine the effect of diversity training on organizational commitment, to determine the effect of diversity training on career satisfaction, and to determine the effect of diversity training on innovation. Ozeki adopted the Goal achievement theory. He considered organization commitment, career satisfaction and innovation as important variables, since innovation is the part of organization environment. The study findings indicated that employees who are trained on diversity registered higher scores in organization commitment, career satisfaction, relationship with managers, utilization of skills, education, and relationship with their colleagues, and with the senior management. Moreover, organizations that practiced diversity had higher scores in career satisfaction of their employees. Similarly, effective management of diversity was found to give opportunity to project manager to utilize the diverse workforce. The study concluded that employees who were trained for diversity were more committed towards their organizations. They were also more satisfied with their careers. Ozeki thus concluded that diversity training has positive effect on innovation. Nevertheless, the study does not indicate the major content and frequency of the sensitivity training needed to address diversity management issues.

A study by Dreachslin [17] sought to identify the context of diversity training programmes, the design features of these programmes and the outcomes reported for diversity training. The study specifically evaluated the effect of context of diversity training programmes on outcomes and the effect of diversity training programmes design on outcomes. The study used goal achievement theory and relied on a systematic review of 36 studies of diversity training in organizations. The study findings indicated that diversity training is fragmented in terms of theoretical underpinnings. Meanwhile, a review of existing studies

did not provide a convincing case concerning the outcomes of diversity training. Therefore, Dreachslin concluded that more resources should be devoted to sensitivity training at the organizational level. The study recommended that more research should address the environmental business organizations, context of diversity training, the design of diversity training programmes and the measurement of outcomes at individual and organizational levels. The study was only limited to secondary sources of data. Moreover, diversity training outcomes measurements were not provided for in the study at both the individual and organizational level.

Mwango, Muya and Nyaboga [18] undertook a study on the adoption of sensitivity training as a workforce diversity management strategy within County governments in Kenya. The main goal of the study was to evaluate success of sensitivity training at the County level. The study adopted a descriptive research design and relied on purposive sampling. Correlation and regression analysis was used to determine relationships between the independent and the dependent variables. The study was guided by the Social-interaction theory to resolve conflicts in past studies about the importance of sensitivity training for County governments in Kenya. The study findings indicated that during sensitivity training, companies interacted with different cultures and clients. Subsequently, diversity training boosts productivity, creativity, new attitudes, global understanding, new language skills, new processes, and new solutions to complex problems. The study concluded that sensitivity training contributes to greater agility, stronger customer and community loyalty, innovation, better market insight, and improved employee recruitment and retention. The study recommended that the human resources, management, public and government leaders need to understand the importance of sensitivity training in the workplace. The results of the reviewed study were mainly qualitative. There was thus a need to generate both qualitative and quantitative data on the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance.

### Statement of the Problem

Ideally, county governments are supposed to bring services closer to the people. To this end, human labour is key [19]. The reality however is that counties are working with a blotted workforce from diverse backgrounds geographically, ethnically, demographic wise and disability wise. Kathimba and Anyieni [15] have noted performance challenges in counties,

including high levels of absenteeism averaged at about 37% annually, and low speeds by county governments to address development issues residents. For example, in 27 sampled counties, project completion was always 2-3 years late for projects scheduled to be completed in two years or less. Moreover, low quality services was registered from the county staff. For instance, 49% of respondents interviewed in a survey by Kundu and Mor [4] noted that over 3 to 4 visits to county offices were necessary to have a service offered to completion.

Efforts have been made to manage these diverse workforce challenges through a number of strategies. For example, in most counties' budgets, funds have been allocated for training sessions across the last few years to sensitize employees on various workplace issues, including diversity, management support and enforcement of HR practices. However, indications are that these practices have not yielded expected performance results [13]. Meanwhile, there have been no studies to show how staff rationalization, especially in parastatals, can enhance the contribution of diversity management practices to organizational performance. Despite the existence of a lot of literature on the relationship between diversity and organizational performance, including Kathimba and Anyieni [15] and Kyalo and Gachunga [13], there is still a dearth of documented literature on the interplay of organizational performance and diversity management challenges. It was, therefore, against this backdrop that the study assessed the influence of sensitivity training, as a workforce diversity management practice, on organizational performance at the county governments of North Rift Kenya.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a correlational research design. It targeted employees working in NOREB counties and their customers. This were eight counties in total and this include the Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Trans Nzoia, Baringo, Turkana, West Pokot, Samburu and Elgeyo Marakwet employees. The employees in the 8 counties consisted of top and middle level management who were represented by members of County Executive Committees (CECs) and Chief Officers while the middle management were represented by the directors and heads of sections of different departments. Each county had representative numbers of customers participating in the study, which was ten percent of the total number of top and middle level management. Therefore, the study target population was 1129. Table 1 presents the distribution of the target population across county and participants.

**Table-1: Target Population**

Counties	CECs	Chief Officers	Directors	Heads of Sections	Customers	Target Populations
Uasin Gishu	10	16	40	68	12	136
Nandi	10	14	42	75	13	144
Trans-Nzoia	10	18	48	78	14	158
Turkana	10	18	49	63	13	143
West-Pokot	10	19	37	64	12	132
Samburu	10	16	38	80	13	147
Elgeyo Marakwet	10	17	45	66	13	141
Baringo	10	16	42	58	12	128
<b>Total</b>						<b>1129</b>

**Source:** Ministry of Devolution (2019)

Krijcie and Morgan [20] formula was employed to ensure that the sample size selected is representative. Therefore, from the target population of 1129, the sample size for the study was 285 respondents, comprising 20 CECs, 34 Chief Officers, 86 Directors, 139 Heads of Sections and 26 Customers.

The study used questionnaires and interview schedules to collect data. The study applied quantitative analysis techniques using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptively data was analysed using frequencies and percentages while in inferential statistics were employed to test the hypothesis. Regression analysis involved finding the best straight-line relationship to explain how the variation in an outcome (or dependent) variable, Y, depends on the variation in a predictor (or independent or explanatory) variable, X.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results of Sensitivity Training

Table 2 presents the responses attained for the item that sought to know the status of sensitivity training in the county governments. The outcome was that 0.0 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed, 4.1 percent disagreed, 20.6 percent were undecided, that is, neither agreed nor disagreed, 44.3 percent agreed and 30.9 percent strongly agreed that there were annual sensitivity training programmes on diversity. On the statement that 'Last sensitivity content involved training on all diversity issues affecting the organization including gender and ethnicity', 0.5 percent strongly disagreed, 12.4 percent disagreed, 10.8 percent neither

agreed nor disagreed, 47.4 percent agreed and 28.9 percent strongly agreed.

On the statement that sensitivity training on gender issues was normally organized as not less than two days workshops, 0.0 percent strongly disagreed, 7.7 percent disagreed, 17.5 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, 32.0 percent agreed and 42.8 percent strongly agreed. Further, responses showed that 0.0 percent strongly disagreed, 9.8 percent disagreed, 10.3 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, 44.3 percent agreed and 35.6 percent strongly agreed that content in sensitivity training was relevant and current to assist solve organizational problems. In addition, 0.0 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed that sensitivity training was conducted together with the general training of other organizational issues. Meanwhile, 36 percent disagreed, 8.8 percent were neutral on this statement, 47.9 percent agreed and 39.7 percent strongly agreed.

On the statement that there were metrics to measure level of security training for all training program, 5.2 percent of the respondents disagreed, 20.1 percent were neutral, 42.8 percent agreed and 31.4 percent strongly agreed. On the statement that sensitivity training happened for all cadres of staff, 10.8 percent disagreed, 18 percent of the respondents were neutral, and 36.6 percent agreed and 34 percent strongly agreed. Finally, on the statement that the concept of sensitivity training was well known and understood by employers, 8.8 percent of the respondents agreed, 17 percent were neutral 43.3 percent agreed and 27.3 percent strongly agreed.

**Table-2: Descriptive Results of Sensitivity Training**

Sensitivity Training		SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	S.D
There are annual sensitivity training programs on diversity.	F	60	86	40	8	0	4.02	0.827
	%	30.9	44.3	20.6	4.1	0	80.4	
Last sensitivity content involved training on all diversity issues affecting the organization including gender, ethnicity	F	56	92	21	24	1	3.92	0.968
	%	28.9	47.4	10.8	12.4	0.5	78.4	
Sensitivity training on gender issues are normally organized as not less than two days workshops	F	83	62	34	15	0	4.1	0.953
	%	42.8	32	17.5	7.7	0	82	
Content in sensitivity training is relevant and current to assist solve organizational problems	F	69	86	20	19	0	4.31	0.923
	%	35.6	44.3	10.3	9.8	0	86.2	
Sensitivity training is conducted together with the general training of other organizational issues	F	77	93	17	7	0	4.24	0.759
	%	39.7	47.9	8.8	3.6	0	84.8	
There are metrics to measure level of security training for all training programs	F	61	83	39	10	0	3.99	0.879
	%	31.4	42.8	20.1	5.2	0	79.8	
Sensitivity training happens for all cadres of staff	F	66	71	35	21	0	3.93	1
	%	34	36.6	18	10.8	0	78.6	
The concept of sensitivity training is well known and understood by employers.	F	53	84	33	17	0	3.82	1.045
	%	27.3	43.3	17	8.8	0	76.	

*Key: SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; M=Mean SD=Standard Deviation*

Overall findings indicated that majority of the respondents, 86.4 percent (mean=4.31, sd=0.923), were of the opinion that content in sensitivity training was relevant and current to assist solve organizational problems. Moreover, 84.8 percent (mean=4.24, sd=0.759) were of the opinion that sensitivity training was conducted together with the general training of other organizational issues. Additionally, 82 percent of the respondents (mean=4.1, sd=0.953) were of the opinion that sensitivity training on gender issues was normally organized as not less than two days workshops. Besides, 80.4 percent (mean = 4.02, sd = 0.827) of the respondents were of the opinion that there were annual sensitivity training programmes on diversity. Similarly, 79.8% (mean=3.99, sd=0.879) of the respondents were of the opinion that sensitivity training was conducted together with the general training of other organizational issues. Another 78.4% (mean=3.92, sd=0.968) of the respondents were of the opinion that last sensitivity content involved training on all diversity issues affecting the organization, including gender and ethnicity. Lastly, 76.0% (mean=3.82, sd=1.045) of the respondents were of the opinion that

the concept of sensitivity training was well known and understood by employers.

The Chief Officers' interview responses noted that there was a need for counties to invest more in sensitivity training for their employees to promote harmonious working among the county staff. One Chief Officer in the human resources department specifically noted that thus: "There is a shortage of funding to the department and as a result the department is not able to budget for sensitivity training for the personnel working for the county. Trainings are however have been conducted in at list twice in the last five years but for only a select groups of respondents working for the county."

### Hypothesis Test Results

The study proposed and tested a hypothesis on the relationship between sensitivity training and organizational performance. The hypothesis stated thus:  $H_{01}$ : There is no significant effect between Sensitivity Training and Organizational Performance. The results of multiple regressions were as presented in Table 3.

**Table-3: Direct Regression Effect of Sensitivity Training on Organizational Performance**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	0.35	0.275		1.273	0.205
	Sensitivity Training	0.077	0.044	0.097	1.758	0.080

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

The findings in Table 3 indicate that sensitivity training had no significant relationship ( $p = 0.080$ ) at 5 percent confidence with organizational performance.

Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Subsequently, there was no significant effect of sensitivity training on organizational performance.

The study further hypothesized that ( $H_{05a}$ ) *rationalization does not moderate the relationship between sensitivity training and organizational*

*performance*. The results of the moderated hierarchical regressions were as presented in Table 4.

**Table-4: Moderating Effect of Rationalization on the Relationship between Sensitivity Training and Organizational Performance**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.638	0.288		2.213	0.028
Sensitivity Training	0.077	0.044	0.097	1.758	0.08
Sensitivity Training * Rationalization	0.341	0.103	0.431	3.310	0.001

Table 4 indicates that sensitivity training had a significant relationship ( $p = 0.001$ ) at 5 percent confidence on organizational performance when moderated with Rationalization. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis not rejected which was that rationalization does moderate the relationship between sensitivity training and organizational performance.

## DISCUSSION

Study findings indicated that content in sensitivity training was relevant and current to assist solve organizational problems. This was in agreement with the view by Parker [21] that content of sensitivity training needs to be relevant. According to Parker, the effect of diversity training courses is usually difficult to measure because of what researchers call demand or social desirability effects – people give the answers they think are expected or which make them look better. Parker found that content of training has a significantly positive effect on employees' attitudes to female colleagues. Their attitudes to gender parity improved markedly compared with the control group. Moreover, attitudes can change but behaviour takes longer to change. It can encourage some people to act. Accordingly, one of the strongest effects was that training prompted women to connect with more senior women.

Klarsfeld, Ng, Booyesen and Christensen [22] also supports this opinion noting that diversity and inclusion training should be tailor-made for the organization conducting it. Corporate diversity training programmes must be based on a foundational understanding of the unique diversity and inclusion objectives and challenges of each organization. To accomplish this, businesses cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach to their training programmes. Each company must take the time to look inward, conduct some fact-gathering initiatives, assess the current company culture, and identify any unresolved conflicts and issues employees face. Surveys, focus groups and other employee audits are some ways to gather information.

Overall, the study findings indicated that content in sensitivity training was relevant and current

to assist solve organizational problems. This was interpreted to mean that the training programmes had only been developed to meet specific objectives while solving specific problems in the organization. Counties with the blotted workforce are likely to face diversity challenges in terms of gender or ethnicity and hence the training content of the diversity programmes need to be tailored to the specific needs of the county. There is, therefore, a need to develop training objectives outside to help guide through the data collection and analysis steps when developing the training programs. Before effective training can be developed and implemented, the company should conduct a thorough self-assessment. The most useful such assessments are conducted by outside experts who bring fresh perspective, objectivity and a commitment to identify key diversity and inclusion barriers, without regard to 'sacred cows' or 'but that's the way we have always done it.'

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that content in sensitivity training needs to be relevant and current to assist solve organizational problems. Training programmes have to be developed to meet specific objectives while solving specific problems in the organization. Counties with blotted workforce are likely to face diversity challenges in terms of gender or ethnicity and hence the training content of the diversity programmes need to be tailored to the specific needs of the county. Sensitivity training, however, cannot influence employee performance without staff rationalization. The Similarity/Attraction Theory supports the need for sensitivity training by maintaining the belief that personality attributes and interpersonal skills are resourceful in shaping the behaviour of employees, especially the manner in which employees perceive issues. Employees, therefore, need to be trained to deal with their personality attributes and interpersonal skills. Human resource in counties needs to ensure that the training content of the sensitivity programs are relevant and current to assist solve organizational problems. Training programmes have to be developed to meet specific objectives while solving specific problems in the organization.

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