



EFFECT OF ADOPTION OF REMOTE WORKING ON SERVICE DELIVERY AMONG DEVOLVED UNITS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN KENYA

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Abstract

Devolution is meant to improve service delivery of citizens. However, despite devolving services to counties, service delivery remains very poor. Lack of good governance policy yields to weak county performance which has led to low public goodwill characterized by poor citizen-government relations in the counties, ethnicity and even though there has been adequate of public participation across counties in Kenya, the performance of devolved particularly Tharaka Nithi county has been minimal particularly during the Covid-19 still minimal as well as service delivery. The general objective of the study was to establish factors influencing quality of service delivery in county governments in Kenya. The target population included county government officials comprises of 485 county ministers and secretary, 1573 MCA's, hence a target population of 2250 out of whom 278 passed as a sample population. The distribution of county government officials across the country is relatively not homogeneous in terms of geographical location in all the 47 Counties in Kenya. The researcher used primary and secondary data. The findings confirm that there is a statistically significant influence of governance structure on quality of service delivery in county governments in Kenya. A positive increase in governance structure leads to an increase in quality of service delivery in county governments in Kenya. It can be concluded from this study that governance structure was statistically significant in

explaining quality of service delivery in county governments in Kenya. The findings confirm that there is a statistically significant influence of accountability on quality of service delivery in county governments in Kenya. A positive increase in accountability leads to an increase in quality of service delivery in county governments in Kenya. It can be concluded from this study that accountability was statistically significant in explaining quality of service delivery in county governments in Kenya.

Keywords: Devolution, Remote working, Service delivery, Strategic human resource practices, Strategic leadership

INTRODUCTION

A well-articulated strategy is extremely important for developed units to achieve set objectives and improve performance over time. There is a growing interest in the study of the relationship between strategic responses during time of a crisis and performance of devolved units management. Recently, innovation has become one of the promising areas of study in terms of explaining competitive differences between firms. The problem of limited resources has made it important for firms to constantly make strategic decisions that will help them achieve and sustain competitive advantage. David, (2017) pointed out that strategy formulation decisions commit an organisation to specific resources, products, technologies and markets over an extended period of time. Strategy formulation process enables a firm to match internal resources with opportunities and risks in its external environment. Furthermore, environmental dynamism and competitiveness pose a serious challenge for managers responsible for formulating strategies in firms.

Since the 1950s the public-sector has widely developed reposes based on relevant strategies eto manage different levels of crisis. Hence as earlier as the 20th century, strategy is acceptably used to refer to a plan for interacting with the organizations environments to achieve its objectives (Daft and Willmott, 2010; Paret & Gilbert, 1986). SM is not about planning and strategy formulation only. Though, it assisted businesses to asses all possibilities, but it deals with potentials before occurrences and enable organizations to adapt and interact with them (Durh, & Judh, 2012). It helped businesses victories and sustainability because it deals with businesses strategy. Strategy is the cornerstone of SM system in all organizations, whether it's military or private or public. Hence its importance came from its essential role for organizations success, stability, and capabilities enhancement (Hunger, Whaleen, 2011).

In Africa, many countries have carried out reforms aimed at decentralizing the political, administrative and fiscal structures of the public sector. The need to transform the structure of

governance is informed by the view that decentralization increases the overall efficiency and responsiveness of the public sector in providing services, an outcome that enhances economic development and contributes to a reduction in regional disparities decentralization has advanced considerably in the last two decades (Amusa & Mabugu, 2016). Moreover, many African central governments have initiated or deepened processes to transfer authority, power, responsibilities, and resources to sub-national levels.

The African countries that have decentralized include Kenya, Botswana, Burkina Faso, 3 Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda (Dickovick & Riedl, 2010). Despite this, the African evidence on the relationship between devolution and service delivery is very limited. Moreover, much of the available evidence is anecdotal or focused on a specific set of issues, such as participation, empowerment or fiscal autonomy. There is paucity of studies that have examined devolution experiences across the Africa region in a comprehensive and comparative way (Batchelor, Smith, & Fleming, 2014).

Nevertheless, SM had shaped public-sector with a strong positive impact on various aspects of this sector performance, it also generated many changes across POs to enhance their performance (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Andrews, Boyne, Law, & Walker. 2012). While, the drive for worldwide public reforms is the performance of POs (Kloot & Martin, 2000; Meier, O'Toole, Boyne& Walker, 2006). However, SM had been triggered long time ago, but it is relatively new in public sector. While, all forms of public sector modifications (New Public Management (NPM), Collaborative Management (CB), Decentralization, and E-government and others) have contributed in establishing the foundations of SM (Ansell & Gash, 2008), and SM existence had dramatically grown within this sector over the past few years (Andrews, Boyne, Law& Walker, 2011; Elbanna, 2013; Elbanna, Fadol, 2016; Kay, McKiernan, & Faulkner, 2003; Ketchen, Boyd& Bergh, 2008; Johnsen, 2016).

Problem Statement

Devolution is meant to improve service delivery of citizens. However, despite devolving services to counties, service delivery remains very poor, Lack of good governance policy yields to weak county performance which has led to low public goodwill characterized by poor citizen-government relations in the counties, ethnicity and even though there has been adequate of public participation across counties in Kenya, the performance of devolved governments is still minimal as well as service delivery. According to Othieno (2012), devolution can be a solution to problems like conflicts, corruption, inequalities, rent seeking, inefficient use of public resources, and economic stagnation. Besides, devolution is also implemented as a reaction to external

pressure from organized groups. For devolution to be effective, however, consensus is paramount.

The Kenyan county governments are expected to draw their strategic plans from Vision 2030 and carry out the flagship projects therein to ensure good performance and excellent service delivery. However, most counties have been facing a myriad of challenges as evidenced on past governors Annual Conferences in Naivasha, Kwale, and Kisumu (Republic of Kenya, 2015). Indeed, Kenya's devolution structure presents massive challenges for political, development, and administrative restructuring by encouraging fragmentation of the state along partisan, regional and ethnic lines or is seen as decentralizing corruption, leaving citizens worse off as the newly established counties fail to put in place the systems needed for effective and transparent service delivery.

According to Mule, (2015), over half of the sampled citizens or 53% stated that they were dissatisfied with the county governments, 28% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and only 18% stated that they were satisfied. However, the findings of the study were limited to companies in the United States. Previous studies conducted locally concerning the effect of strategy implementation and organizational performance noted that little attention has been paid by researchers in this area resulting to conceptual and contextual gaps. For example a study by (Machuki, 2015) revealed that effective strategy implementation in modern competitive firms was directly correlated with improved customer satisfaction, business diversification, change management, new product development, business process reengineering and employee motivation.

KIPPRA, (2015) also revealed that County Governments in Kenya have mostly failed to fulfill expectations of citizens due to political wrangles hence during times of crisis the situation may not be different given that they are the same players involved to deliver during difficult circumstances like COVID-19 pandemic. If the nothing is done as far as boosting service delivery in among county governments during difficult circumstances like the current COVID-19 outbreak then the devolved units may fail to deliver their mandate of them.

Objective of the Study

To investigate the effect of adoption of remote working on service delivery among devolved units in Kenya during the COVID-19 outbreak in Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

This covered the theoretical review featuring the tax morale theory and also past studies carried out before respectively

Stewardship Theory

Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson first advanced the theory of stewardship in 1991 (Caplan, 2014). They argued that a steward's main duty is shareholders' wealth protection as well as maximizing via the performance of public institutions, since only then can the steward's utility functions be maximized. This view therefore treats the public entities managers like stewards functioning on behalf of the government and should therefore always seek to ensure that the institutions perform as they are intended to for the interest of the public.

The theory obtains that stewards as such can only derive their satisfaction and motivation from the achievement of the county governments (Mwirichia, 2013). This theory is therefore built on the knowledge that it is important to put in place structures that vest a lot of power on the steward while at the same time giving him/her maximum autonomy derived from trust. It emphasizes that employees or executives must always act independently in order to ensure the desired public trust and performance. The basics of stewardship theory are borrowed from psychology, which centers on the conduct of administrators (Ho, 2015).

The steward's conduct is expected to be in favor of the institutions entrusted to them, and the public enjoys from their self-serving conduct and the steward's conduct won't deviate from the concerns of the public needs given that he tries to achieve the goals of the institution entrusted to them. Where public wealth is boosted, the steward's utilities likewise gets augmented since the institution's achievement will cater for most prerequisites and the role of the stewards will be in the open. Stewards adjust pressures between the various recipients and the members of the public. Subsequently, the theory is a contention advanced in the performance of the public entities that fulfills the prerequisites of the invested government resources bringing about dynamic performance, which results in better administration (Kapopoulos and Lazaretou, 2011).

On the other hand, it is also upon the members of county assemblies to shield their name as the people who make decisions in county government. They therefore are obliged to operate in such a way that the public coffers from both the national and county are well utilized (Lapie and Périlleux, 2008). Another school of thought held by Kapopoulos and Lazaretou (2011) however insists that stewards usually return benefits to the government entities so they can create a favorable name that will aid their re-entry into the market in future in benefit of the careers. According to the theory, the government institutions' management acts as the stewards for the public and in the greatest wellbeing of the principals (Abdullahi, 2000).

Regularly, the good and reliable way in which a public management acts prompts them as having a reputation for genuineness and honesty with the members of the public (Farrar, 2008). Administrators that act as stewards are trusted by government as well as the public. In

this way, steward-like conduct by directors at the county management positions of the association frequently advances positive public citizenship practices all through the government positions. Like depictions of public organizations stewards and their practices, stewardship is portrayed as biased towards social, collectivist, agreeable, public environments, which inspire workers who put their trust in the entity.

Adoption of Remote Working

A Gartner (2020) survey of 229 Human Resources (HR) departments showed that approximately one-half of the companies had more than 80% of their COVID-19 and the Workplace 7 employees working from home during early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic – and estimated substantial long-term increases for remote work after the pandemic. The need for millions of workers to WFH in response to COVID-19 has accelerated recent remote work trends facilitated by the rise of connectivity and communication technologies. While “remote work” is a broader category since it can include Work From Anywhere (i.e., not necessarily home), we do know that some – such as professionals who need to perform complex tasks that require little interaction with peers – actually prefer and are more productive if they WFH (Allen, Cho, & Meier, 2014).

Yet as large numbers of workers are forced to work from home, many face challenges due to such fundamental issues as not having space in one's home to attend to work. Employees who live with others also face a larger set of challenges than those who live alone since they need to navigate others' space as well (see later section on Family Status). Employees often find it challenging to maintain boundaries between work and non-work (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). The forced confinement of workers during the COVID 19-pandemic has further complicated this issue. While WFH might sound appealing if it offers a safe harbor, the absence of separation between one's work and home – and the lack of commutes to provide a transition between the two domains – can become a burden too.

Questions that would benefit from closer study include: how do our experiences in the work and non-work domains influence each other, and how do our work and non-work identities interact, when they unfold at home? One domain that might offer lessons – in addition to being increasingly important independently – is the experience of gig workers (i.e., people taking on very-short-term jobs [Ashford, Caza & Reid, 2018]) since they often Work From Anywhere (e.g., as drivers, shoppers, and delivery people). Reflective of the gig economy's expansion prior to COVID-19: in the US, at least, 20% of the current workforce are freelance workers (McKinsey & Co, 2016), COVID-19 and the Workplace 8 and that number has been predicted to grow to 40% by the mid-2020s (Gillespie, 2017).

Remarkably, labor economists estimate that all of the net job growth between 2005 and 2015 was in this sector (Katz & Kruger, 2016). While so-called rideshare companies were shut down as part of the first wave of reactions to the COVID-19 outbreak, a corresponding boom in various delivery services staffed by gig workers shows the growth potential of such jobs. The challenges that gig workers are known to face will sound familiar to those required to WFH since they include getting and staying organized; managing the heightened emotions associated with such work; figuring out and maintaining an identity so that those emotions do not disrupt the productivity upon which their survival depends; coping with loneliness while also seeking out and maintaining functional relationships that support the work; and, establishing some semblance of a longer-term career (Ashford et al., 2018).

While it would not have been anticipated prior to the pandemic, future research into understanding participation and participants in the gig economy – starting with the assumption of economic precarity as a fact of life (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019) – now appears likely to offer relevance for understanding (mandatory) WFH. As with challenges, “best practices” for WFH can also benefit from what we know has been helpful for gig workers (since they also typically do not work in traditional office settings). Such practices include actions to generate and maintain connections; actions to focus and inspire their work; explicit routines that enable the work and provide boundaries between work and home; and, both a place where the work is performed as well as an underlying purpose for the work that enables and inspires productivity as circumstances become challenging (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Future research is also needed that examines patterns in individual cognition – cognitive and learning agility, general proactivity, emotional resilience, and relational skill to COVID-19 and the Workplace 9 better understand and enable individuals to not only survive in this new world of work, but also to thrive (Ashford et al., 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used both descriptive survey research design and explanatory research design to help identify, analyze, and describe the relationship between governance decentralization and service public delivery in county governments in Kenya. A descriptive study is one that is undertaken with a view of offering the researcher a profile or to describe relevant aspects of the phenomena of interest from an individual, organization, organizational, industry oriented, or other perspective (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Emory & Cooper, 2003; Sekaran, 2009). Thus, descriptive survey design was used to allow for description of governance decentralization and service delivery variable. Previous researches examining the relationship between

decentralization and service delivery have used the descriptive design (Abe & Monisola, 2014; Macharia et al., 2014; Opiyo, 2014; Wangari, 2014).

The target population included county government officials comprises of 485 county ministers and secretary, 1573 MCA's hence a target population of 2250 out of whom 278 passed as a sample population. The list of the 2,250 county government officials was sourced from the directory of Commission on Revenue Allocation (2018) and <http://kenyacountyguide.com> website as at 31st December 2014. The distribution of county government officials across the country is relatively not homogeneous in terms of geographical location in all the 47 Counties in Kenya

Data was collected through instruments developed by the researcher under the supervision of university supervisors. The choice of data collection instrument is often very crucial to the success of a research and thus when determining an appropriate data collection method, one has to take into account the complexity of the topic, response rate, time and the targeted population (Mwangi, 2015) The data collection instruments were questionnaires. Kothari (2004) defines a questionnaire as a document that consists of a number of questions printed or typed in a definite order on a form or set of forms.

FINDINGS

The researcher distributed 278 questionnaire and managed to obtain duly filled questionnaires from 210 respondents. This was a 76% response rate. This response rate is above the recommended percentage of 50% (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012) Among the remaining questionnaires, 40 of them were incomplete, and 28 questionnaires were not returned.

Gender vs Education

Table 1: Gender * Education

		Education				Total
		Certificate	Diploma	Degree	Postgraduate	
Gender	Male	2	42	53	12	109
	Female	1	37	47	16	101
Total		3	79	100	28	210

The questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate their ages and education levels. This could help determine the ability to comprehend the questionnaire as well as tell how the county employees rank in terms of education. The respondents were comprised of a majority, 109, of

males and women were 101. Further, the majority of the employees, 100, were degree holders. Among the degree holders, a majority, 53, were men while women were 47 only. In the postgraduate level, women were the majority, 16 as compared to men who were 12 in number. In both diploma and certificate, men formed the majority, 42 and 2, while women being 37 and 1, respectively.

Remote Working

The study respondents were asked to indicate how remote working has impacted on their service delivery to the public in the county governments. The findings are indicated in table 4.7 below.

Table 2: Remote working

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The county equipped us well to be able to work from home	210	3.15	1.073
There was ready support to enable efficient working from home environment	210	3.18	1.070
I was able to focus on my tasks and complete them on time	210	3.03	1.018
I met my targets and the end of every month while working remotely	210	3.07	1.026
There was increased coordination as a result of working from home	210	3.20	1.080

From table above, the findings indicated that the county government were not well equipped in working from home. With an aggregate score of 3.15, it is clear that service delivery was negatively impacted. There was minimal support to workers to enable efficient working from home environment which indicated by a mean aggregate of 3.18. Focus on tasks by employees and completing them on time had an average of 3.03, target achievement had an aggregate mean of 3.07 and coordination among the workers had an aggregate mean of 3.20. This average score in part indicated the indifference of the workers concerning the service delivery in county offices during the lockdown period. Further, it is a likely indicator of low and or poor service delivery in the county offices due to lack of proper coordination and support from the right parties to ensure better service delivery.

From analysis of the qualitative data in this part, it was revealed that the home environment was not so conducive due to the nature of households in the country. Many respondents indicated to be living with other family members who could disrupt them while working leading to a low target achievement and low effectiveness in working. The findings also noted a lack of office space in homes, which also presented a challenge to the employees in working from home.

Service Delivery

Concerning overall performance in service delivery in the county, table 3 indicates the obtained results from the study.

Table 3: Overall performance of service delivery

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The county has improved the quality of its services over time.	210	3.02	.748
We get positive feedback from the public and private organizations that have transacted with the county	210	2.86	.610
There is increased revenue collection in the county	210	3.00	.653
The county processes its payments to contractors on a timely basis	210	2.97	.747
The county achieved its goals in the year 2020	210	3.09	.714

There were neutral views concerning the overall county performance. From table 3, improvement of service quality had an aggregate mean of 3.02, increase in revenue collection had a mean of 3.00 and achieving of goals in 2020 had an aggregate mean of 3.09. The respondents did not agree with other statements. Giving of positive feedback on service delivered had an aggregate mean of 2.86 and payment of contractors on timely basis having a mean score of 2.97. Overall, there was no clear indication of improvement of service to the public during the lockdown period.

As shown in table above, independent factors that were studied explained only 60.7% of strategic responses on service delivery in the counties. The delivery of services was represented by the adjusted R². This therefore meant that other factors not included in this study contributed to 39.3% on services delivery in the county offices in Kenya. From table

above, the processed data, the F statistics was 0.662 with p-values = 0.019, which is less than or equal to 0.05 indicating the model was significant for further statistical analysis.

Further, the coefficients of determination explains the extent to which changes in the dependent variable can be explained by the change in the independent variables or the percentage of variation in the dependent variable (Service delivery by the County Governments) that is explained by all the four independent variables (remote working, strategic leadership, strategic human resource and strategic preparedness).

The study applied the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS V 24) to enter, code and analyze the data using multiple linier models. The results also were used to test and either accept the study hypotheses. The results are displayed in tables 4 below.

Table 4: Model Summary, ANOVA and Regression Coefficients

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.113 ^a	.379	.607	.58629		
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.911	4	.228	.662	.019
	Residual	70.467	205	.344		
	Total	71.377	209			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.289	2.319		10.312	.000
	Remote Working	-.523	-.242	.043	.612	.000

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that remote work had a moderate significant negative effect on service delivery in county governments in Kenya. The study identified that remote working by the workers in the county governments was faced with challenges of lack of the necessary infrastructure like technology and a work force that is well informed on the use of technology. Further, it was also noted that there was little support to employees working from home. Hence, it was not easy for them to perform as per the set goals and meet the acceptable service delivery levels. Further, a lack of office space and a private space to work from at home

contributed to missed goals, which also impacted on the productivity of the employees, which resulted in a decline in service delivery of the workers.

The study concludes that even though strategic responses had a significant influence on service delivery in the counties, inappropriate employee skills and inadequate employee support in terms of education sponsorships, customized training, poor infrastructure and lack of commitment from county leadership were issues of concern to be addressed.

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