

Effect of Career Opportunities on Employee Engagement in Fairtrade Horticultural Firms in Kenya

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to determine the effect of career opportunities on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. Theory that informed the study was Expectancy theory. This research adopted pragmatism research philosophy. A cross-sectional descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study targeted 17 fairtrade horticultural firms as unit of analysis and 5,600 employees as the unit of observation. The sample size was 373 respondents drawn from low level, middle level, and top-level management. The study relied mainly on primary data. The study adopted stratified and simple random sampling techniques. After the stratification of the respondents into strata, simple random sampling was adopted to pick up the respondents. The researcher used

questionnaire as the research instrument. Descriptive and inferential analysis were computed using SPSS version 26. In order to analyze the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable the study used Multiple Regression analysis at 5% level of significance. The findings indicated that career opportunities have a positive and significant effect on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The study concluded that career opportunities contribute significantly to the employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The study recommended that Horticultural firm management should create opportunities for career development of employees, offer training ground for career movement within the organization. Nomination for employees to undergo various staff career growth and development programs such as training should be conducted in a fair and transparent manner by the management.

Keywords: Career Opportunities, Employee Engagement, Fairtrade Horticultural Firms, Extrinsic Incentive System

Introduction

Establishing a workplace atmosphere that promotes employee engagement is crucial for the success of a firm. This will aid in retaining skilled individuals, cultivating customer loyalty, and ultimately enhancing corporate performance and shareholder value (Albrecht *et al.*, 2021). Employee engagement encompasses those who are actively engaged, those who lack engagement, and those who are actively disengaged (Arifin *et al.*, 2019). Tian and Robertson (2019) found that employees who aspire to achieve greatness in the workplace have a strong commitment to their responsibilities. Consequently, they exhibit a reduced likelihood of attrition, heightened productivity levels, superior customer service, and ultimately contribute to increased profitability within the firm.

Engaged employees distinguish themselves from their unengaged and actively disengaged colleagues due to the continuous discretionary effort they provide to their responsibilities. These employees willingly go the extra mile, work with passion, and feel a profound connection to their company (Ahakwa *et al.*, 2021). These individuals are the ones who will stimulate originality and propel the organization towards progress. Consequently, prioritizing the enhancement of involvement should be a strategic imperative (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Prioritizing the establishment of a constituency comprised of actively involved workers is crucial. Individual engagement is a subjective experience that begins with each person. Consequently, receiving feedback that acknowledges their worth as people in the workplace may greatly influence workers' perception of their entire life (Arzamasova & Esaulova, 2021). Azmy (2019) contends that engagement pertains to the establishment of circumstances that encourage workers to provide a greater extent of their skills and potential.

Every company regards human resources as very significant (Ababneh, 2021). The success or failure of a company is contingent upon the workers who comprise it. In order for a firm to operate efficiently and thrive in the age of globalization and intense competition, it is imperative that they guarantee the personnel they employ is dependable. Adhitama and Riyanto (2020) argue that firms must enhance employee engagement and motivation in order to enhance organizational performance.

Raza *et al.* (2021) posited that employee engagement entails a profound sense of dedication and active participation from employees in pursuit of corporate objectives. Engaged personnel really appreciate, get satisfaction from, and exhibit a sense of pride in their job. Extensive research has documented the positive correlation between engagement and

various organizational outcomes, such as improved performance, enhanced organizational effectiveness, increased customer satisfaction, higher employee satisfaction, greater productivity, and reduced staff turnover (Nasidi *et al.*, 2019).

According to Sari and Ranihusna (2019), the overwhelming majority of companies fail to address their company's working environment, which therefore hurts the overall performance of their workers. They claim that the workplace includes ensuring the security of employees, keeping their jobs, fostering cooperation and effective communication, and encouraging competence and active involvement in decision-making. Companies have seen that when employees regard themselves as being important, it results in increased commitment and a sense of ownership towards their job. Various factors in the work environment, like pay, working hours, level of autonomy, and organizational structure, might potentially affect employee satisfaction (Hameduddin, 2021). This study aims to investigate the relationship between employee incentives, engagement, and the work environment in the Horticultural business in Kenya.

The words used by Ariussanto *et al.* (2020) express that the concept of perception is an instance of a process of awareness of an object. One technique of acquiring knowledge involves constructing a synthesis of sensations and their corresponding information. Through his inquiry, he discovered that the perception of workers has a substantial influence on the quality of the workplace and may have a considerable effect on employee retention (Judeh, 2021). Workplace conditions are likely to improve when workers see their work, their job, and their relationships in the workplace as favorable. Companies that have a terrible reputation in the market may see the departure of skilled employees who choose for other employment opportunities.

Chakraborty and Ganguly (2019) recognized employee engagement in performance terms i.e. employee engagement is employee's willingness and ability to contribute to company success by freely giving the extra effort on an ongoing basis. According to Duque, Pereira, Santos, and António (2020), understanding the degree of employee involvement in a business is crucial for initiating and achieving successful change. The favorable correlation between engagement and performance leads to increased internal efficiency and cost savings inside enterprises.

Nevertheless, the achievement of employee engagement is contingent upon the presence of incentives. Incentives are extrinsic motivating strategies used by corporations to reward workers who demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm and contribute to the achievement of the organization's objectives. The significance of motivation lies in its ability to stimulate employees to get recognition and receive rewards for their achievements. Workers need a well-designed system of rewards and incentives in order to achieve high levels of performance (Rasool *et al.*, 2021).

Incentives may be classified into many categories based on their respective functions. Positive incentives, such as providing cash bonuses to workers who achieve a certain level of competence, are a kind of rewards that aim to promote specific behaviors. Alternatively, punishments which alter people's behavior are described as negative incentives, such as threatening employees by withholding privileges, such as reductions in their salary. Finally, providing extra remuneration is seen as a tangible motivator, including incentives such as cash bonuses, commissions, regular promotions, motivating advances, and profit sharing with bonuses, among other forms of compensation. This approach to incentives has also been applauded for stimulating employee engagement and, thus, a reward system should be established that is attuned to the requirements of the workforce (Albrecht *et al.*, 2021).

In most organizations, reward is now focused on improving engagement levels and motivating employees (Welmilla & Ranasinghe, 2020). Every worker needs to feel appreciated due to their efforts in the work they do and working for long hours (Suomi *et al.*, 2021). What they receive as payment, need to correlate with the efforts they offer in their jobs. While the expectations of earlier generations were quite straightforward, nowadays individuals are looking for employment that satisfies them and compensates them fairly (Atik *et al.*, 2023). The value proposition that an employee is offered in terms of rewards is called total rewards (Turner & Turner, 2020). The value that an employer has on the work done by the employees and gives it as a reward package which includes all the jobs done and the total hours they worked is called total rewards (Hossen *et al.*, 2020). Proper reward and recognition systems help with the linkage of performance. Motivation is derived either from financial rewards or non-financial rewards or both (Kim & Kim, 2021). A good rewarding system can motivate employees to engage in organizational activities properly (Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2021). The attractiveness and fulfillment of work are shown through the total rewards that employees are offered by their employers (Biriowu & Ofurum, 2020). The people are the ones mostly emphasized here. Every employee wants to work for an organization that identifies their best talent, provides them with a compelling future, promotes their growth, and offers a good working environment and good total pay. Being given time to attend classes and being offered free lunches are not part of the total pay. It also includes having work that is interesting and exciting, good colleagues, and effective leaders (Nasir & Irfan, 2023). Before even Kenya gained independence when it was under the British economy, it was known for its capability in exporting fresh horticultural produce to other countries where Kenya was supposed to contribute to East Africa's budget (Kariuki, 2021). Kenya began exporting fresh horticultural produce to even Europe after independence and the business flourished (Mwangi, 2019). The GDP in Kenya is contributed largely by agriculture in Kenya (Kogo *et al.*, 2021). From the total export in Kenya, 65% is usually agricultural products to other countries, which is one-third of its produce (Chacha *et al.*, 2024). The major reason why Kenya is appropriate for the growth of flowers was; a labor force that is cheap and well-educated, climate conditions that are favorable and being able to enter into big markets such as Europe (Moore & Hanson, 2022). The industry was boosted through the knowledge gained and capital that attracted it (Chomba & Nyang'au, 2019). In Kenya, the fastest segment growing is the Cut-Flower Industry. It provides the country with an annual turnover of 600 Million Dollars being the largest export industry. Globally, Kenya stands at fifth position in the export of flowers. The flowers in Kenya are largely exported to Netherlands, Germany, and the U.K. Many advantages are accruing from the flower export industry in Kenya, which has led to the growth and development of the economy (Opondo, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The Horticultural industry in Kenya has used incentive programs including as promotion, training, career development, and work flexibility to enhance staff motivation and ensure efficient and high-quality service delivery. Nevertheless, employee job motivation remains low, even in the presence of incentive schemes (Chepogisho, 2019). The horticulture business has seen adverse press due to inadequate management of human resources and unfavorable working conditions, leading to a dissatisfied workforce (Chepogisho, 2019). This highlights a characteristic of uninvolved personnel, which has significant implications in a

labor-intensive business, undermining the advantages that an organization may get from labor savings (Al Zeer *et al.*, 2023).

As to the International Labour Organization (ILO) report of 2022, agricultural labor productivity in Kenya has had a continuous fall over the last thirty years, mostly attributed to disengaged personnel and many other causes. A survey conducted by the Fairtrade Foundation revealed that Kenyan flower farms had an average absence rate of 10%. This is a possible sign of disinterest or lack of involvement, as stated in the Fairtrade Flower Report of 2023. The national figures reveal a substantial staff turnover rate of 20.7% among the horticulture companies in Kenya. This indicates the possibility of disengagement problems among many floral companies in Kenya. The source of this information is the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, specifically from the year 2022. As per the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) study from 2020, the cut flower sector has faced allegations of subjecting workers to excessive working hours that beyond the legally required limit of eight hours per day. According to the Government of Kenya GoK (2023), employees must work a total of 45 hours per week, with eight hours each day from Monday to Friday and five hours on Saturday. However, a study conducted by Kaaria (2022) in Kenya reveals that workers in the cut flower business often worked for extended periods, often exceeding 10 hours per day and sometimes up to 15 hours per day without breaks. This was particularly common during peak seasons like Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. In July 2010, a walkout occurred involving approximately 1,500 employees of Aquilla and Karuturi farms due to unfavorable working conditions and inadequate salaries. This strike was the third occurrence within a span of less than two weeks (Muindi, 2020). The research aims to determine whether workers in the cut flower sector comply with the Constitution of Kenya (2010) by working for the mandated eight hours per day.

Using contingent incentives as a technique for increasing employee engagement in manufacturing firms was explored by (Al Marshoudi *et al.*, 2023). According to the findings, incentive systems in the modern world rely mostly on financial and non-financial benefits. It is evident that incentive systems contribute immensely to employee motivation, performance, productivity, and commitment. Given the critical role that employees play in an organization, this study sought to find out, how career opportunities can be used as a strategy to influence employee engagement to contribute to the productivity and growth of the organization. This study thus sought to better understand the role of career opportunities on employee engagement in the Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya.

Objective of the Study

- To determine the effect of career opportunities on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

The study tested the following null hypothesis:

H₀₁ There is no significant influence of career opportunities on employee engagement in the horticultural sector in Kenya.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Vroom (1964) was responsible for proposing the expectancy theory. This theory emphasizes the efforts that individuals make in their specific processes where they are supposed to make

sure the goals set are achieved effectively. Motivation is determined through three important elements that are considered by Victor Vroom. Valence is the first element. Valence is the importance that the individual places upon the expected outcome. For the valence to be positive, the person must prefer attaining the outcome to not attaining it. For example, if someone is mainly motivated by money, he or she might not value offers of additional time off. The fact that one can have the belief that they can attain a certain level of performance, which helps them achieve the desired goal which is called instrumentality as the second element. Expectancy is the third element which involves a person combining both efforts and performance where there are efforts made, then good performance is automatically expected. How a certain goal can be attained and how that goal attracts individuals is what determines their motivation.

According to this theory, an employee is supposed to be offered a reward according to their efforts as this motivates their level of valence which results to good performance (Mwaruta, 2022). The performance of an employee's effort is what determines their level of motivation and the will to achieve goals (Nnko, 2022). The efforts made by individuals according to this theory determine their level of motivation which in turn results in the person achieving their personal goals. Performance has strong relationships with efforts; rewards and personal goals where these three controls an individual's behavior (Nnko, 2022). The rewards that employees receive determine their level of motivation and attractiveness to the goal that is meant to be achieved as predicted by the Expectancy Theory (Gachui, 2022). The work that employees do is done more effectively when they are promised valued rewards in their organizations. The three aspects of the Expectation Theory (employee expectancy, instrumentality, and valence) are used to analyze an organization's performance.

The performance and the motivation of employees and the organization are explained through the Expectancy theory of motivation. Employees have different expectations and levels of confidence about what they are capable of doing. Management must discover what resources, training, or supervision employees need (Rukumba, 2021). The worker's ability level is dependent on the performance of the employee's motivation, while the workers' motivation is dependent on the performance ability according to Mansaray (2019). There is no addictiveness and interactiveness in both the performance and motivation relationship.

The performance of an employee is what is used to evaluate their organizational context. Most of the employees put much effort into practice when they realize that their efforts will lead to performance, which the management acknowledges. Their efforts are therefore rewarded and acknowledged through the performance that is acknowledged by the organization. The performance of projects is determined through the suitability that employees have on instrumentality. There is the development of attitude and positive emotions resulting from personal goals of individuals that are gotten from rewards. The performance of an employee's effort is what determines their level of motivation and the will to achieve goals (Patricia & Asoba, 2021). The efforts made by individuals according to this theory determine their level of motivation which in turn results in the person achieving their personal goals. Performance has strong relationships with efforts; rewards and personal goals where these three control an individual's behaviors (Patricia & Asoba, 2021). The rewards that employees received determine their level of motivation and attractiveness to the goal that is meant to be achieved as predicted by the Expectancy Theory (Kamau & Nyang'au, 2019). The work that employees do is done more effectively when they are promised valued rewards in their organizations. Employee's expectancy, instrumentality and valence which are the three dimensions of the Expectancy Theory, are used in determining the performance of

the organization (Hassan et al., 2020). This theory is used in this study to indicate the effect of training and career development on employee engagement in the Horticultural sector in Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

The hypothesized relationship between independent variable and dependent variable is summarized in figure 1.

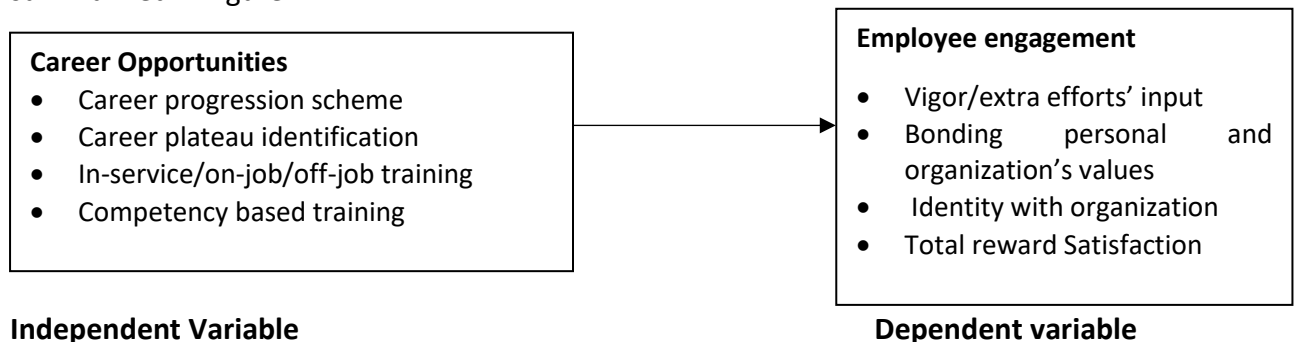


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Empirical Literature

Muchibi et al (2022) assessed the influence of career development on engagement of employee in the public health sector in Kenya. The findings obtained indicated that career development had a positive moderate and significant influence on employee engagement in the public health sector in Kenya. The study concludes that when career development is low or not provided to nurses and doctors within the public health sector, their engagement level will decrease. Failure to implement diverse and supported career development programs and learning opportunities could cost the sector a lot in terms of decreased engagement affecting service delivery and performance. Guyo and Mutumbu (2019) sought to assess the influence of career advancement on employee engagement in NGO's operating in Meru County, Kenya. The study revealed that 54% of variation on employee engagement is influenced by career advancement. Further, unit change in career advancement of an employee will increase employee engagement. Even when career advancement opportunities are non-existent, employee engagement was still positive.

Ranjan (2021) explored linkages of employee engagement to career development. It was hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between employee engagement constructs and career development of employees. It was also assumed that employee engagement in organizations has predictive value with respect to career development of employees. In conclusion, it is worthwhile to mention that employee engagement as a predictor has significant relationship and explanatory capacity with the constructs of career development. It should also be mentioned that what appears to a moderately respectable relationship has turned to be a conditional relationship when demographic variables as moderator are taken into account. Also, there are direct relationship between demographic variable with predictor and criterion variable. Therefore, organization while using employee engagement as predictor of useful developmental outcomes, an organization should moderate their interventions according to the demographic profile of the employees.

Tekletsadik (2022) assessed the impact of career development on employee engagement at Wegagen Bank S.C. The study found that staffs of Wegagen Bank are only moderately engaged to the bank. More so, the findings of the study revealed that the combined effect of

various career development practices influenced employee engagement positively. Thus, the study concluded that improved career development practices are an increasingly important weapon for improving engagement of employees. Therefore, the management of Wegagen Bank should influence these career development practices as a way of improving the engagement of employees. Ramli et al (2022) examined how career development can affect employee engagement mediated by organizational commitment to employees of PT. Bank Aceh Syariah Head Office (Bank Aceh KPO). The result proves that career development affects organizational commitment, organizational commitment affects employee engagement, career development affects employee engagement, and career development affects employee engagement through organizational commitment.

Suherman et al (2023) sought to determine and analyze the impact of career development and employee engagement on employee performance, either separately or simultaneously. According to the study's findings, career development and employee engagement have a combined or partial impact on employee performance. Mustaqim and Sary (2022) intended to answer research questions, how the influence of career development and job satisfaction on employee engagement of the risk division of the start-up company PT. X. The results research show that career development and job satisfaction either partially or simultaneously have a significant effect on employee engagement in the risk division of the start-up company PT. X. The large contribution of career development and job satisfaction to employee engagement of the risk division employees at the start-up company PT. X.

Hendrawan and Pogo (2021) aimed to find out, develop and test the influence of Organizational Culture, Career Development, Work life Balance on Employee Engagement of PT XYZ. Based on the results of statistical tests found that Career development has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. Mule et al (2020) aimed to investigate the relationship between career development and employee retention. The correlation results revealed a positive and significant relationship between career development and employee retention. The study concluded that career development was found to have a significant relationship with employee retention. It was established that offering on job training, off-the-job and overseas training are key contributors in career development that can affect employee retention in the County Government of Meru. Tamsah et al (2021) looked at the methods used in the company to keep workers engaged. One of the most important findings of the research is a better knowledge of the elements that impact an organization's capacity to keep its employees happy and productive. In addition, the researcher has given recommendations depends upon the key findings, such as how to retain & motivate staff, among other things.

Ndiritu (2020) sought to establish the impact of career development on the engagement of non- academic staff at Kenyatta University. From the model results, Internal promotions impacts highest to staff engagement while performance feedback has the lowest impact. At the 5% level of significance, training, promotions and skill enhancement are statistically significant to staff engagement. Mentorship and performance feedback are statistically not significant to staff engagement. Field (2021) aimed to understand how professional development impacts employee engagement, more specifically, career development for nurses working in the hospital or home healthcare setting. This study considers all those constructs and measures engagement in the context of motivation, positive feelings towards one's employer, and intention to remain with the organization. Like engagement, development is an expansive term, and this study explores nurse preferences for development and focuses specifically on the impact of career development. Key findings

include the illumination of factors impacting career decisions and development, the interconnectedness of career development and motivation, and the positive impact of career development.

Research Methodology

This research adopted pragmatism research philosophy which is premised on a reasonable and logical way of doing things or of thinking about problems that is based on dealing with specific situations instead of on ideas and theories. In this study, a cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. This was founded on the basis that the study involves various horticultural firms in Nakuru County. More so, cross-sectional studies are carried out at a specific point in time or over a short period of time (Sileyew, 2019).

The population for this study was all cadres of employees (21,030 employees) of the Horticultural firms in Kenya registered with Fairtrade Africa (17 Fairtrade horticultural firms). Therefore, the 5,600 employees, consisting of low level, middle level, and top-level management staff working with the registered Fairtrade horticultural firms constitute the sampling frame. The target population (5,600) is quite large and this necessitated sampling. To scientifically calculate the sample size, A representative sample size with 95% confidence and risk levels were selected, based on the work of Yamane (1967) formula. Therefore, 373 respondents were the lowest acceptable number of responses to maintain a 95% confidence level and a 5% error level. A proportionate sample size of approximate 373 respondents was the unit of observation. which is 5% precision of the population was selected using a stratified sampling technique from the identified study sample size of the population. After the stratification of the respondents in the cadres (low level, middle level and top management) and simple random sampling techniques was adopted to pick up the respondents.

The study relied mainly on primary data. The researcher used questionnaire as the research instrument. A self-administered structured questionnaire was dropped to each respondent and picked later. The questionnaire consisted of both open ended and closed ended questions and were divided into two parts covering demographic variables and study variables. Out of 373 administered questionnaires, 315 questionnaires were successfully filled and handed back to the researcher which gives 84.4% response rate

The research instrument was pilot tested before its administration for data collection using a few respondents working with Desire Flora horticultural firm in Kajiado County. The participants in this study were 10% of the sample size, that is, 37 respondents. The filled questionnaires underwent both reliability and validity tests. Instrument's reliability was tested through Cronbach's Alpha (α). The Cronbach alpha ranged from 0.877 for employee career development to 0.930 for employee engagement. Since the questionnaire consistency was way above 0.7, the questionnaire had high consistency between the items, where the internal consistency between the items of the tool was very high. The content validity was achieved through ensuring that each item was appropriate for a particular variable construct through determination calculation of the content validity index. The construct validity was maintained through restricting the items to the conceptualization of the variables and ensuring that the indicator of a particular variable is within the same construct. All the items were retained based on the general rule of thumb for acceptable factor loading of 40% (Career development factor loading was 77.4% and employee engagement was 84.2%).

To provide information, the data was processed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques in the context of SPSS 26. Data processing was carried out through editing, coding and classification. Content analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data whereas

multiple regression analysis was utilized to analyze the quantitative data by aide of SPSS Software version 26. Analyzed data was presented in form of tables, charts and graphs for ease of comparison and inference. By using Regression analysis at the 5% significance level, the research evaluated the connection between the independent factors and the dependent variable.

The Findings of the Study

Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Study

To determine the level of employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya, the respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with the following seven statements. The results are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.0

Employee Engagement

5- Strongly agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2- disagree;1- strongly disagree, S.D-Standard Deviation, N-Sample Size

Employee engagement	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	S.D
1. There is a feeling of vigor in accomplishing job tasks.	45.1%	21.3%	6.7%	16.5%	10.5%	3.74	1.435
2. There is enthusiasm about looking for opportunities to improve the organization’s performance	34.9%	32.7%	4.8%	17.5%	10.2%	3.65	1.375
3. There is a strong connection between personal values and organization values	36.5%	27.9%	9.8%	13.3%	12.4%	3.63	1.407
4. There is strong identification with the organization’s success and failures	36.2%	30.8%	5.4%	17.5%	10.2%	3.65	1.384
5. There is pride associated with working for the organization	26%	33.3%	20.6%	13%	7%	3.58	1.203
6. Employees keep up to date with any development within their job area/field	31.4%	28.3%	19%	15.2%	6%	3.64	1.237
7. Employees always volunteer to do extra work outside their job tasks to contribute to the organization’s success	39.4%	27%	9.5%	15.9%	8.3%	3.73	1.342
Average level of N							
Employee Engagement	315	1.14	5.00	3.66		1.21	
			Maximum	Grand Mean		Std. Dev.	

As shown in table 1, 45.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that at their job, they feel

strong and vigorous in accomplishing job tasks while 21.3% agreed on the same assertion. On the other hand, 6.7% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that at their job, they feel strong and vigorous in accomplishing job tasks while 16.5% disagreed and 10.5% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.74 indicated that the respondents agreed that at their job, they feel strong and vigorous in accomplishing job tasks and a standard deviation of 1.435, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Regarding enthusiasm about looking for opportunities to improve this organization's performance, 34.9% of the respondents strongly agreed and 32.7% agreed on the same statement. Conversely, 4.8% of the respondents were neutral on the statement, while 17.5% disagreed and 10.2% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.65, revealed that the respondents agreed on the statement that there is enthusiasm about looking for opportunities to improve the organization's performance and a standard deviation of 1.375, indicating a high variation in the responses.

The results also revealed that 36.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is a strong connection between personal values and the organization values, while 27.9% agreed on the same assertion. However, 9.8% of the respondents were neutral on the statement, while 13.3% disagreed and 12.4% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.63 indicated that the respondents agreed that there is a strong connection between personal values and the organization values and a standard deviation of 1.407, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Further, the results revealed that 36.2% of the respondents strongly identify with this organization's success and failures while 30.8% of the respondents agreed on the same assertion. On the other hand, 5.4 % of the respondents were neutral, 17.5% disagreed while 10.2% strongly disagreed that they strongly identify with this organization's success and failures. With a mean of 3.65, the participants agreed that there is strong identification with the organization's success and failures and a standard deviation of 1.384, indicating a high variation in the responses.

However, 26% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is pride associated with working for the organization and another 33.3% agreed. On the other hand, 20.6% of the total respondents were neutral on the statement, while 13% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.58, the respondents agreed that there is pride associated with working for the organization and a standard deviation of 1.203, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Moreover, 31.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that employees keep up to date with any development within their job area/field and 28.3% agreed on the same assertion. In addition, 19% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that employees keep up to date with any development within their job area/field, while 15.2% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed on the same. With a mean of 3.64, the respondents agreed that employees keep up to date with any development within their job area/field and a standard deviation of 1.237, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Lastly, the results revealed that 39.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that employees always volunteer to do extra work outside their job tasks to contribute to the organization's success, while 27% agreed on the same statement. Moreover, 9.5% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that employees always volunteer to do extra work outside their job tasks to contribute to the organization's success, 15.9% disagreed while, 8.3% strongly disagreed that employees always volunteer to do extra work outside their job tasks to contribute to the organization's success. With a mean of 3.73 the participants agreed that

employees always volunteer to do extra work outside their job tasks to contribute to the organization’s success and a standard deviation of 1.342 indicating a high variation in the responses.

Apparently, the average level of employee engagement (Grand mean) according to the sampled respondents was at 3.66 with a standard deviation of 1.21. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed with most of the statements that were used to measure employee engagement. However, significant standard deviation shows they were some variations implying that this rate of engagement is not uniform amongst the sampled firms. The report by Setiawan and Negoro (2023) asserts that in order for workers to implement a business plan, they must have the required skills and credentials. With respect to this, however, it is imperative that organizations make good use of their people's skills in the effort to increase employee engagement. Engaged workers are those that want to help the company grow by providing the finest service or excellent work (Andrić *et al.*, 2023). Further, Ningsih *et al.* (2023) analysis on the measures of employee engagement reiterated that an engaged employee; believes in the organization, works actively to make things better, treats others with respect, and helps colleagues to perform more effectively, can be relied upon, and goes beyond the requirements of the job, sees the bigger picture even at personal cost, identifies with the organization, keeps up-to-date with developments in his/her field; and last but not least, looks for, and is given, opportunities to improve organizational performance.

Table 2.0

Career Opportunities

5- Strongly agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2- disagree;1- strongly disagree, S.D-Standard Deviation, N-Sample Size

Statements on Career Opportunities	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	S.D
1. There is an operational career development policy for all employees	33.7%	30.2%	14.9%	15.9%	5.4%	3.71	1.235
2. There are regular career development competencies assessment in terms of self/career awareness, goal setting/skill-development competence scores	20.3%	45.7%	13%	16.2%	4.8%	3.61	1.122
3. Department heads support employees in meeting their work related and career development needs	31.7%	36.2%	7.9%	18.1%	6%	3.70	1.255
4. Employees who have stagnated in one job grade (career plateau) are identified and considered for career development opportunities	30.8%	36.5%	5.7%	20%	7%	3.64	1.292
5. There are customized career development plans to cater	33%	33%	8.9%	19%	6%	3.68	1.275

for varied employees' career development needs								
6. There are competency-based trainings to develop employees with diverse technical skill/professional competencies	17.5%	35.2%	27.6%	15.6%	4.1%	3.46	1.077	
7. There are regular staff training and development needs assessment for all cadres of employees	23.8%	35.2%	16.8%	20%	4.1%	3.55	1.173	
8. Career training and development opportunities are given out equitably to all cadres of employees	22.9%	39%	13.7%	21%	3.5%	3.57	1.156	
Average level of Career N opportunities	315	1.38	5.00	3.61	1.03			

As shown in Table 2, 33.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is an operational career development policy for all employees while 30.2% agreed on the same assertion. On the other hand, 14.9% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that there is an operational career development policy for all employees while 15.9% disagreed and 5.4% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.71 indicated that the respondents agreed that there is an operational career development policy for all employees and a standard deviation of 1.235, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Regarding the existence of regular career development competencies assessment in terms of self/career awareness, goal setting/skill development competence scores, 20.3% of the respondents strongly agreed and 45.7% agreed on the same statement. Conversely, 1.3% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that there are regular career development competencies assessment in terms of self/career awareness, goal setting/skill development competence scores, while 16.2% disagreed and 4.8% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.61, revealed that the respondents agreed on the statement there are regular career development competencies assessment in terms of self/career awareness, goal setting/skill development competence scores and a standard deviation of 1.122, indicating a high variation in the responses.

The results also revealed that 31.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that department heads support employees in meeting their work related and career development needs values, while 36.2% agreed on the same assertion. However, 7.9% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that department heads support employees in meeting their work related and career development needs, while 18.1% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.70 indicated that the respondents agreed that department heads support employees in meeting their work related and career development needs and a standard deviation of 1.255, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Further, the results revealed that 30.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that employees who have stagnated in one job grade (career plateau) are identified and considered for career development opportunities, while 36.5% of the respondents agreed on the same assertion. On the other hand, 5.7% of the respondents were neutral, 20% disagreed, while 7% strongly

disagreed that employees who have stagnated in one job grade (career plateau) are identified and considered for career development opportunities. With a mean of 3.64, the participants agreed that employees who have stagnated in one job grade (career plateau) are identified and considered for career development opportunities and a standard deviation of 1.292, indicating a high variation in the responses.

However, 33% of the respondents strongly agreed that there are customized career development plans to cater for varied employees' career development needs and another 33% agreed. On the other hand, 8.9% of the total respondents were neutral on the statement that there are customized career development plans to cater for varied employees' career development needs, while 19% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.68, the respondents agreed that there are customized career development plans to cater for varied employees' career development needs and a standard deviation of 1.275, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Moreover, 17.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that there are competency-based trainings to develop employees with diverse technical skill/professional competencies and 35.2% agreed on the same assertion. In addition, 27.6% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that there are competency-based trainings to develop employees with diverse technical skill/professional competencies, while 15.6% disagreed and 4.1% strongly disagreed on the same. With a mean of 3.46, the respondents fairly agreed that there are competency-based trainings to develop employees with diverse technical skill/professional competencies and a standard deviation of 1.077, indicating a high variation in the responses.

According to the findings in the table above, 23.8% of the respondents strongly agreed there are regular staff training and development needs assessment for all cadres of employees while 35.2% agreed on the same. On the other hand, 16.8% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that there are regular staff training and development needs assessment for all cadres of employees, while 20% disagreed and 4.1% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 3.55, the respondents agreed that there are regular staff training and development needs assessment for all cadres of employees and a standard deviation of 1.173, indicating a high variation in the responses.

Lastly, the results revealed that 22.9% of the respondents strongly agreed that career training and development opportunities are given out equitably to all cadres of employees, while 39% agreed on the same statement. Moreover, 13.7% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that career training and development opportunities are given out equitably to all cadres of employees, 21% disagreed while 3.5% strongly disagreed that career training and development opportunities are given out equitably to all cadres of employees. With a mean of 3.57 the participants agreed that career training and development opportunities are given out equitably to all cadres of employees and a mean of 1.156, indicating a high variation in the responses.

The average level of career opportunities (Grand mean) according to the sampled respondents was at 3.61 with a standard deviation of 1.03. This implies that most of the respondents were in agreement with most of the statements that were used to measure career opportunities. However, significant standard deviation shows that there were some variations implying that the career opportunities is not uniform amongst all the sampled firms. Promotion is an effective tool to increase the spirit to work. If the employees are provided opportunities for the advancement and growth, they feel satisfied and contented and they become more committed to the organization (Hendrawan & Pogo, 2021). Suherman *et al* (2023) further states that a promotion is not just beneficial to employees but also very

important to the employer since it does not only involve change in rank but also more duties and responsibilities to the employees. Management should therefore take careful assessment and evaluation of employees’ skills, performance, and length of service, education qualifications and training given to the employee. Ranjan (2021) in his work stresses a few practices which assist in minimizing staff turnover. Short listing applicants who are searching for improvement chances can be useful for the company if it provides professional successes. It is fundamental to give career training and progression of the career in the organization with the goal that the workers can create and further develop themselves. Muchibi *et al* (2022) demonstrate results from a review that shows main causes behind workers in leaving or remaining in a given company.

Linear Regression between Career Opportunities and Employee Engagement

The hypothesis of the study sought to establish the significance of the causal and effect relationship between career opportunities and Employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The inferential results revealed that there is direct relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. This implies that increase in career opportunities would results to increase in the employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The coefficient of determination through the R square indicated that up to 59.7% of change in employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya is significantly accounted for by Career opportunities (R²=0.597, P=0.000) as shown in Table 3. This implies that career opportunities are significant predictor of employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. Guyo and Mutumbu (2019) established that training had a positive influence on employee performance in the public university in Kenya. At this case, job orientation proved to have a beneficial impact on the level of performance in the Kenyan public university. Ranjan (2021) found that these practices help in promoting decision-making, providing guidance to staff on career related rights and obligation, development of a healthy self-concept among individual employees and improve relationship and teamwork between staff at different levels.

Table 3

Linear Regression analysis between Career Opportunities and Employee Engagement

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.773 ^a	.597	.596	.62950

a. Predictors: (Constant), Career opportunities

b. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	183.656	1	183.656	463.462	.000 ^b
Residual	124.033	313	.396		
Total	307.689	314			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Career opportunities

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
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	β	Std. Error Beta		
1 (Constant)	-.653	.217		-3.008 .003
Career opportunities	1.153	.054	.773	21.528 .000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement

The ANOVA test results from above Table 3 were $F(1, 313) = 463.462$, $P = 0.000 < 0.05$; an indication that the Simple Linear Regression model was a good fit to our dataset. The regression Coefficient results showed that $\beta = 1.153$, $t = 21.528$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$; therefore, Career opportunities had a statistically significant influence on the Employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. This implies that Employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya Career opportunities had a positive standardized beta coefficient = 1.153 as shown in the coefficients results of Table 4.29; this indicates that Employee engagement is predicated to improve by 1.153 when the Career opportunities variable goes up by one unit. To predict the Employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya when given the level of Career opportunities, the study suggests the use of the following model.

Employee engagement = -0.653+ 1.153 Career opportunities

These findings agree with Muchibi *et al* (2022) who established that career development has significant effect on engagement of employee in the public health sector in Kenya. Similar, Ranjan (2021) mention that employee engagement as a predictor has significant relationship and explanatory capacity with the constructs of career development. Tekletsadik (2022) found that staffs of Wegagen Bank are only moderately engaged to the bank. More so, the findings of the study revealed that the combined effect of various career development practices influenced employee engagement positively. The result of regression also indicates that career development predictor variables internal promotion, career specialty training and career counseling have statistically significant contribution on employee engagement. Career planning, on other hands, did not have significant effect on employee engagement. The adjusted R^2 of 0.58.5 indicates 58.5% of the variance in employee engagement can be predicted by career development practiced of the bank. Thus, the study concluded that improved career development practices are an increasingly important weapon for improving engagement of employees.

However, some other studies have indicated contradictory outcome. Some studies have indicated positive insignificant relationship between career growth and development and performance. For example, Veronica *et al* (2021) revealed that there was statistically insignificant positive relationship between career advancement and employee performance. The coefficients associated with career advancement were found to be insignificant since their associated p-values were greater than the level of significance. That is, the p-value associated to career advancement was found to be 0.71 which is greater than the level of significance (0.05) and hence the three coefficients are both statistically insignificant.

Other studies have also established negative relationship between career growth and development and performance. Nurpida (2023) sought to determine the influence of career development on employee performance in Public Works Department of Bali Province. The study established that career development negatively affects performance by not significant. The insignificant relationship can be caused because most of the respondents are senior employees so they are well aware about the corporate organization culture.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Contribution of the Study

Majority of the respondents were in agreement that there is an operational career development policy for all employees, there are regular career development competencies assessment in terms of self/career awareness, goal setting/skill development competence scores; department heads support employees in meeting their work related and career development needs; employees who have stagnated in one job grade (career plateau) are identified and considered for career development opportunities; there are customized career development plans to cater for varied employees' career development needs. Career training and development opportunities are given out equitably to all cadres of employees. By rejecting the null hypothesis, the study concluded that there is significant influence of career opportunities on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. Employee engagement such as vigor/extra efforts' input, bonding personal and organization's values and identity with organization was achieved through career progression scheme, career plateau identification, in-service/on-job/off-job training and competency-based training.

This research contributes significantly to both theoretical and contextual aspects of organizational management by establishing a direct relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The findings enhance existing theoretical frameworks in human resource management and organizational behavior, shedding light on the critical role played by well-structured career opportunities in fostering employee engagement. This study's contextual significance lies in its specific focus on Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya, providing nuanced insights into the dynamics of career development and engagement within this unique sector. By demonstrating the substantial impact of career opportunities on employee engagement, the research offers actionable knowledge for organizations, policymakers, and practitioners, emphasizing the strategic importance of investing in career development programs to enhance employee engagement in the context of Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya.

The study recommended that Horticultural firm management should create opportunities for career development of employees, offer training ground for career movement within the organization. Nomination for employees to undergo various staff career growth and development programs such as training should be conducted in a fair and transparent manner by the management. This can be achieved through well-defined training policy that considers various opportunities associated with training programs. This would motivate employees to participate in various staff career growth and development programs which would enhance employee engagement.

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