



# EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT ON THE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF WATER SERVICE PROVIDERS IN MERU COUNTY, KENYA

Juma, Winfridah Nafula, Moguche, Abel, Kanyiri, Adel

Kenya Methodist University, Meru - Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

*Operation efficiency is critical for the smooth running and sustainability of water utilities. Employee engagement is integral to the operational efficiency of non-profit organizations in Kenya, including water service sector. Studies show that when the employees are appropriately engaged, managed and monitored, the organizations will avoid unnecessary losses and costs, achieving operational efficiency. This research scrutinized the effect of employee engagement on the operational efficiency of water service providers in Meru County. The objectives analyzed the variables of delegation, consultation and unions and their influence on the operational efficiency of Water Service Providers in Meru County. The study was anchored on three theories: Classical scientific, AMO, and social exchange theories. The Research was conducted on two water service providers: Imetha Water and Sanitation Company Limited and; Meru Water and Sewerage Services. The target population was 200 employees involving the corporate management team, middle management, and operative employees. The researcher selected 132 sample respondents from the population for the study. The researcher adopted an expository research design approach. Data was gathered using questionnaires. Content validity was used in the study, and Cronbach's Alpha was employed to measure the reliability of the research instruments. KMO and Bartlett Tests were carried out to test the validity of the research instruments. Data collected was analysed and evaluated using SPSS (Version. 21) and presented in charts, tables, and graphs. The variables of the influence of employee engagement were correlated against the operational efficiency of water service providers using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The study hypothesis was tested using a two-tailed normal distribution test at a 5% significance level. The results indicated a P value was 0.000 ( $P < 0.05$ ) implying that employee engagement had a significant effect on operation efficiency of water service providers in Meru County. The study recommended that the WSPs adopt employee engagement strategies improve their operational efficiency for sustainability purposes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Employee engagement, operational efficiency, water service providers

## INTRODUCTION

Getting water and sanitation is one of the most vital human rights passed by the United Nations Human Rights Commission under resolution 64/292 on 28th July 2010. Water utilities are mandated to provide water to the public; hence, operation efficiency is mandatory for sustainability purposes. Nevertheless, the operational efficiency of utilities is a means to realize national targets and, by extension, the acceleration to realization of the rights to water (Water Service Regulatory Board, Impact Report for FY 2018/2019). Therefore, the federal government ascertains those citizens have access to clean water by implementing regulatory measures through the Water service regulatory board. The primary concern is to guarantee the cost-effectiveness of their operation. For this reason, they are ascertained by the extent to which they engage their skilled and well-motivated workforce to achieve operation efficiency (Sajjad et al., 2020)

Efficiency improvements are a key factor that a public water utility should consider to receive funding for investment realization (Guerrini et al., 2015). Appreciating the importance of water security is one matter. According to Cook and Baker (2012), it is one thing to define the cost-effectiveness of water provider companies and water securities; however, measuring the sufficiency is much harder because of the many different views on the gauge. Therefore, Operational efficiency should be a calculated strategy that is aimed at reducing costs and maximizing production (Hosain et al., 2020)

McCann (2004) expounded on organizational efficiency as the benchmark through which an institution can successfully fulfill its mandate through its core strategies. Alexander (2018) defines operational efficiency as the propensity of an institution to bring down the waste of material resources and effort, to the furthest extent,



even so, generating a superior service or product. Functional cost-effectiveness is described as the ratio between the input required to keep the organization going and its output (Lannier & Porcher, 2014). However, the optimum operational efficiency of an organization does not depend solely on its financial resources or adopting the most recent technology but depends on how its committed, motivated and skilled workforce is engaged (Mohamed et al., 2020)

Africa faces many limitations regarding financial capital resources and a skilled workforce to achieve the desired water quality to reach most people (World Bank, 1999). Water utilities must efficiently utilize their professional human capital, machines, and other resources to reduce costs and increase output (Altab, 2021). An organization's operational efficiency is a model to show how the organization is profitable in a short-term cycle and hence its long-term sustainability (Al-shaiba et al., 2019). Achievement of operation efficiency for water utilities is becoming a rudimentary element because water is a fundamental human right; hence it should always be available and accessible (Storto, 2013)

Organizational efficiency depends on several factors that must be installed and enhanced within the operating system to remain efficient (Al-Shaiba et al., 2019). Water utilities experience a fast shift in the workforce trend due to changes in customer demand due to technological changes. The paradigm shift has called for the need to come up with strategies to curb the situation by enhancing employee skills through training (Estache, 2001). He adds that human resources are key resources of water utilities; hence, they should be handled with utmost care to ensure they know what they are supposed to deliver.

Operational efficiency is pegged on some organizational functions that must be developed and implemented as a benchmark for that organization to be efficient (Al-Shaiba, 2019). True to the above statement, water utilities are obligated to have a sustainable operation because the resource they provide is scarce and needs to be regulated (Frontier Economics, 2008). Therefore, although fresh and clean water is limited, it can only be accessible to all if we avoid wastage and resources are projected to be available in the required quantity and quality (Dublin water conference report, 1992)

In Kenya, many water service providers inherited schemes from the national government, whose infrastructure was depilated and hence required a lot of financial and skilled human resources capital to rehabilitate (Kisima Report, 2008), as quoted by Sarah & Muturi (2015). Therefore, it is essential for water service providers to develop measures that can enhance the utilities' efficiency in service delivery and accountability. In addition, water service providers have a reason to manage their resources well to reduce maintenance costs, region clustering to enjoy economies of scale, and train employees to achieve efficient revenue collection (Sarah & Muturi, 2015).

Water service providers need to achieve 100% collection efficiency for the utilities to sustain the cost of their operation. Collection efficiency is an indicator of the WSP's operation efficiency, which is the percentage ratio of the amount billed versus the amount collected (Wasreb impact report 2010/2011). Since the operational efficiency of an organization can be achieved through acquiring and maintaining a skilled workforce, as stated by Sajjad et al. (2020), many organizations are challenged to adopt talent management as a strategy for the human resource department to achieve organizational efficiency and performance (Hongal & Kinange, 2020).

Talent management is a new, expounder term shell that involves a variety of long-lasting applications aimed at getting the precise employees in the correct job at the conventional time (Cappelli & Keller, 2018). Talent superintendence is an amalgated set of processes mapped out and put in place to captivate, enlarge, bring into play, and maintain the expertise to accomplish an organization's prudent objectives and meet future needs (Mihelic et al., 2020). Talent management also focuses on employee investment, and any organization that wants to gain a competitive advantage should make talent management one of its topmost corporate agendas (Ally, 2020).

Yona et al. (2015) opine that the current business environment is dynamic. Many organizations want a competitive advantage as they go global and are pressured to perform better than before. Hongal and Kinange (2020) agree with Yona et al. (2015) that the domain in which the institution is run is very complex and dynamic due to technological changes, thus putting pressure on the organization to have a talented workforce that can put up with the stress and problems in a sophisticated manner. Diny et al. (2020) opine that the talent management process is very important because it ensures that the organization is very effective in recruiting the most skilled workforce and training them to achieve expertise group.

Organizations have moved from the usual norm of maintaining their market share through product differentiation to concentrating on their unique human resources (Mohammed et al., 2020). Mukherjee and Yadav (2020) observed that acquiring a talented workforce is the most crucial step for any organization because employees are the most important assets that turn raw input into meaningful output. They add that the progressive triumph of any business corporation is pegged on the eminence of the workers of that particular corporation.

In Kenya, a report released by World Health Organization titled Vision -2030 (May 2010) states that drinking water availability and accessibility were a challenge because of rapid global climate change. Therefore,



in drastic climate change, the WSPs ought to be prepared to be resilient and sustainable. Wasreb Impact report (2018/2019) states that the corporate governance guidelines seek to establish favourable structures and systems to ascertain an economic, efficient, and feasible supplying of water amenity and hygiene services. To ensure that the above is achieved, Wasreb continues to provide guidelines and regulatory policies to protect the water consumer's rights.

Per the Wasreb impact report (2018/2019), the coverage area for the two utilities is 59%, reflecting a population of 13,823,700. The 59% is out of a total of 23,430,000 in the service area for all the water utilities in Kenya. The sector benchmark coverage percentage is supposed to be 80%. Therefore, many people cannot access clean and safe drinking water. This means that many people are affected by waterborne diseases due to the fact that they consume raw water, which is prone to contamination. Owing to the above reasons, the water quality factor is mandatory as a target benchmark to ensure safety for all consumers and avoid infections brought about by compromising the quality of water supplied to customers by Water service providers.

In Meru County, the non-revenue water percentage for Imetha Water and Sanitation Company Ltd is 50%, which is unacceptable. Meru Water and Sewerage Services is 21%, acceptable but still not good (Wasreb Impact Report, 2018/2019). This report means the level of wastage is still high, especially for Imetha Wasco. Since NRW is one of the core indicators of water utilities operation efficiency, the researcher wanted to determine whether having a skilled and motivated workforce can generate positive results. Non-Revenue water is water that has been released to be supplied to the customer, but it cannot be accounted for. According to Imetha Wasco's technical report (2021), the high level of NRW was caused by factors like pipe leakages, pipe bursts, billing customers on flat rates, and stalled meters.

Many assumptions have been made about the operations of water service providers in urban areas and those that operate in rural areas. One of them is that water utilities in urban areas are operated efficiently due to their proximity to many customers. In contrast, those who serve the rural areas struggle to sustain themselves due to the high operation cost and low returns. However, a keen check through the rankings (Wasreb impact reports from 2010-2020) indicated that some water utilities operate in rural areas but still are highly ranked. Therefore, against these uncertainties, the researcher opined that there might be other factors causing discrepancies in operational efficiencies for water service providers, one of them being talent management. Therefore, the research study desired to establish the ramifications of talent management on the operational efficiency of water service providers in Meru County.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite water occupying two-thirds of the world's total mass, it is still not accessible to most people. The Dublin water conference report (1992) states that fresh and clean water is a finite resource instead of an ever-growing population fighting for the same scarce resource. Water security has been a challenge and is an issue that should be dealt with urgently by the concerned authorities because water scarcity is a threat to human livelihood (Jensen & Wu, 2018). A technical report by WHO – Vision 2030 Kenya (2010) indicates that the phase of climate change harms water and sanitation services companies. Therefore, WSPs should develop measures to attain resilience and sustainability. According to Wasreb (2019), WSPs can achieve sustainability, water rights, and attaining national targets if the WSPs operate efficiently.

There have been numerous studies done in Kenya regarding water utility efficiency, like the ones by Kangangi (2015), Sarah and Muturi (2015), and Wagah et al. (2010). All the studies mentioned among others presented contextual gaps. The gaps are because they presented other factors as independent variables that are not Talent management. In addition, they were done in water service providers in other Counties, which may have different internal environmental regulators such as organizational culture due to social pressures resulting from the communities' beliefs and values.

Another issue is that over 10,000 people die each year due to diarrhea, of which 90 percent is caused by the consumption of contaminated water (UNICEF- Kenya, 2020). The role of WSPs is to increase their water coverage by reducing NRW and ensuring their water quality is at the desired national target of above 95% (Wasreb Impact report 2021). Meru Water and Sewerage services 1st quarter technical report (2020/2021) suggested that for the water quality not to be compromised, the officer in charge of water quality must be experienced and trained intensively to have the desired competency.

On the other hand, Imetha Wasco has been suffering inefficiencies in its water supply to customers in recent years in Timau, Tigania, and Mitunguu Schemes. The major setback is that most available water is lost through leakages and bursts (Imetha Wasco 3rd quarter technical report, 2021/2022). The above contributes to the 50% NRW, which needs to be reduced. The key players in achieving the desired NRW are the WSPs workforce because they are the ones who repair the leakages and bursts.

According to WASREB impact report 13 (2021), the total population of people in Meru County is 1,563,640, out of which a total of 791,847 have access to safe and quality drinking water. Those who have



access to water make up only 51% of Meru county's total population. Therefore, it meant 49% of the remaining population were consuming raw or untreated water, which was not safe. Nevertheless, the 5-year strategic plan for Meru County Urban Water and Sanitation Services Corporation for 2021-2026 stated that extension of service lines was mandatory to reduce the unserved area population. The plan was to ensure the progressive realization of the rights to water. However, skilled labour was needed to ensure quality work to increase the area of coverage and the WSPs' efficiency.

### **Purpose and Hypothesis of the Study**

This study was poised to explore the influence of employee engagement on the operational efficiency of water service providers in Meru County.

**Ho.** Employee engagement has no statistical significance on the operational efficiency of water service providers.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Employee engagement is an engine of talent management because it helps employees increase their resilience and commitment at work (Ahmed et al., 2020). Engaging employees in workplaces leads to their empowerment. Hence, they can adapt to changes in the environment and make quick decisions for business sustainability (Olatunji, 2019). Turner (2019) researched engaging employees in contemporary organizations to achieve high productivity and gain a competitive advantage. The study indicated that in the current economic world, employers want an engaged workforce aware of what is required of them. The researcher adds that it is essential to have an engaged workforce; they can understand that every contribution they make towards production is crucial to achieving the eventual efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

Vercic (2021) carried out a study to examine whether engaging employees and employer attributes have an impact on the employee satisfaction of internal communication. The results from the study indicated that employee engagement and employer branding have a positive and significant impact on internal communication satisfaction. The study highlights that internal communication satisfaction puts employees at the forefront to feel recognized and appreciated, which leads to their effectiveness. The study adds that a practical human resource will automatically increase an organization's profitability, attractiveness, and sustainability.

Fidyah's (2020) carried out a study on the effects of employee engagement on job satisfaction and employee performance. 52 employees were selected as the sample size through a stratified sampling technique. The results implied that employee engagement has a solid and a remarkable association with employees' satisfaction on internal communication and achievement of their targets. The study concluded that an engaged workforce is motivated and does not hesitate to achieve improved and increased productivity.

Sendawula et al. (2018) studied the benefaction of mentoring and engaging employees to the efficiency of employees in Uganda's health sector. The sample size consisted of 150 employees, and the method of data collection used to collect primary data was questionnaires. Regression analysis was carried out to show the effect of training and capacity building on the performance of employees. The findings stipulated an optimistic and consequential interrelation between mentoring and employee engagement on the efficiency of the workers. The study recommended that top management should always involve their subordinates in decision and policy making to inspire them to achieve what they collectively agreed on with management. The study also recommended that organizations train their employees to have an enabled human resource with the required skills to perform their tasks.

Antony, (2018) opines that an organization with an engaged employee has the edge over the competition due to improved productivity and efficiency, reduced cost of operation because of less turnover, minimized absenteeism, enhanced loyalty, and goodwill. Rameshkumar (2020) agrees that employee engagement is a precursor of many organizational and operational outputs, such as employee performance, commitment, effectiveness, and competitive advantage. He adds that committed employees yield increased output at a low cost because of a positive mindset and a sense of responsibility for every decision and step they take.

Hoque et al. (2018) studied the impacts of compensation systems and employee engagement on the performance of employees. Two hundred respondents were selected as the study's sample size. The study findings indicated that compensation and employee engagement had a solid and remarkable linking with employee performance. The study recommended that organizations should put in place better remuneration and engagement strategies that can achieve a more motivated workforce and willingness to work without being coerced.

According to Arifin et al. (2019), employee engagement increases the level at which employees are satisfied with their work and hence put in more effort to increase their effectiveness. The research study was pivoted on the effects of employee self-efficacy and engagement on employee performance. The research study



was done on 140 respondents of the palm oil company. The outcomes of the study indicated that self-efficacy and employee engagement have a solid and remarkable impact on the productivity of employees. The research suggested that companies whose top management delegate duties to their juniors empower them to be future leaders for succession planning.

Turner (2019) posits that having engaged employees play a vital role in an organization. It results in a strategic advantage that includes cost effectiveness, more voluntary effort, faster market time, rapid revolution, unique products and increased customer satisfaction. For that reason, the employees will immerse themselves in their roles, maximizing their efficiency, which can be reflected in increased efficiency, optimum profitability, shareholder value, and agility. Van (2021) concurs with Turner (2019) that developing an empowered, innovative, and engaged workforce is a coherent method to achieve organizational efficiency and improved performance.

Sivapragasam (2018) propounds that many organizations' operational efficiency has been affected because the employees are not committed to achieving the desired results. Therefore, the study proposes that the human resources management department should keep at brisk employee matters like engagement and well-being to achieve the overall employee efficacy, which is salient to achieving the coveted efficiency of an organization. Anwar, (2021) also proffers that due to the changing demand and expectations of investors and customers, many firms are turning to employee engagement who can assist in keeping their businesses at the edge of competition. The study concludes that employees can do this by minimizing costs and renewing products and processes to operate efficiently; hence the business can continue to exist in a very competitive environment. Employee engagement is a strategic workplace approach that ensures the well-being of all the workforce who become more committed to the organization and are more persuaded to bestow its favorable outcome with the intensified comprehension of their welfare (Nagori, 2022)

## METHODOLOGY

The study covered two water service providers in Meru County: they were Imetha Water & Sanitation Company Limited (Imethawasco) and; Meru Water & Sewerage Services (Mewass). The two companies are managed as Meru County Urban Water and Sanitation Services Corporation. The choice of the two was justified by the fact the two are the only ones in Kenya that operate under a corporation. A descriptive research design was adopted. The target population for the study included 10 corporate management teams, 25 middle management, and 165 operative staff, summing up to 200 employees. Stratified sampling technique assisted the researcher in dividing the population under study into three different correspondent classes and simple random sampling was used to choose participants from the categorized strata hence a making a sample size of 132 respondents. The study used questionnaires in data collection.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The reliability test revealed that Cronbach's Alpha value associated with employee engagement was 0.829 with 4 items under the measure. Examples of questions sought were the level at which the respondents consented with the statements asserting that; employees are consulted during the formulation and implementation of WSP's strategies; there is a good relationship between the management and the union.

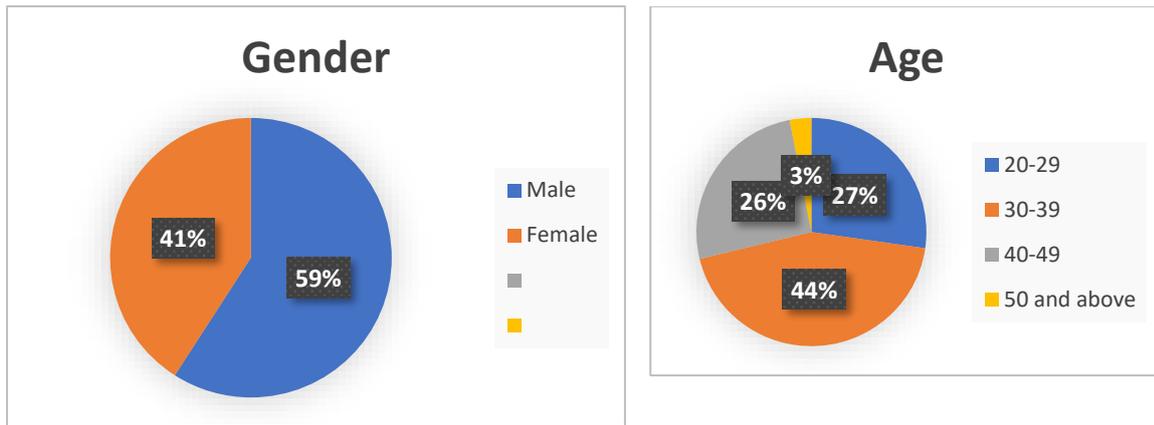
### Gender and Age of respondents

This section presents the crosstabulation of gender and age distribution of the respondents

**Table 1: Gender \* Age Crosstabulations**

		Gender * Age Crosstabulation				Total	%
		Category of Age					
		20-29	30-39	40-49	50 and above		
Gender	Male	20	28	26	4	78	<b>59.09</b>
	Female	16	30	8	0	54	<b>40.91</b>
Total		36	58	34	4	132	
	%	<b>27.27</b>	<b>43.94</b>	<b>25.76</b>	<b>3.03</b>		

Source: Researcher, 2022



Source: Researcher, 2022

The table showed that 27.27% of the total respondents were between the age brackets of 20-29, 43.94 % were between 30-39, 25.76% were in the age bracket of 40-49, and only 3.03% were above the age of 50 years. The outcomes manifested that most of the respondents were in the age range of 20-29 years. Due to the nature of the job in the technical and production department it requires energetic people hence justification of the youthful workforce. Out of the 132 respondents, 78 were male, having a percentage representation of 59.09%, while the female were 54 respondents having a percentage representation of 40.91 of the total number of respondents. The findings suggest that most of the respondents who participated in the research were middle-aged and young employees. In addition, the percentage distribution for male and female respondents indicates that the WSPs do not discriminate against any gender based on adequate representation for both males and females.

**Respondents level of Education**

The study also aimed at determining the respondents’ level of education. This is shown in the table 2 below.

**Table 2: Respondents level of Education**

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Certificate	42	31.8
	Diploma	60	45.5
	Bachelor Degree	23	17.4
	Post Graduate Degree	5	3.8
	Total	130	98.5
Missing	System	2	1.5
Total		132	100.0

Source: Researcher, 2022

The table above determined that 31.8% of the respondents had attained a craft certificate, 45.5% a diploma certificate, 17.4% a bachelor’s degree, and 3.8% had a postgraduate degree. 1.5% of the respondents did not disclose their level of education. The findings show that most respondents had attained a diploma. Most of the employees in the Water Service Providers are in the technical department hence having obtained a certificate or diploma course from the technical institutes makes it possible to make an entry into the job market. Another reason is that the nature of the work is hands on and technical and vocational training institutes offer best training.

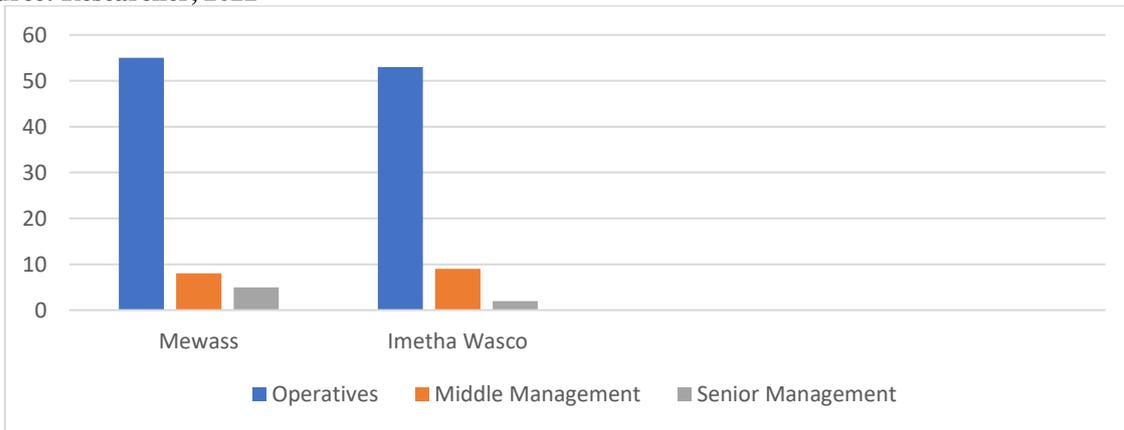
**Respondent’s WSP versus employment cadre**

The study was conducted in two major water service providers in Meru County. The employees were grouped into three strata. Table 3 below shows how many respondents from each WSP and employment cadre participated in the research.

**Table 3: WSP \*Employment Cadre Crosstabulation**  
**WSP \* Cadre Crosstabulation**

		Employment Cadre			Total	%
		Operatives	Middle Management	Senior Management		
WSP	Mewass	55	8	5	68	52
	Imetha	53	9	2	64	48
Total		108	17	7	132	

Source: Researcher, 2022



According to the above table, it was revealed that Mewass employees who participated in the research were 52%, while Imetha respondents were 48% of the total number of respondents. The number of operative employees who were engaged in the study were 108; the middle management were 17, while the senior management were 7. This means that most of the respondents were operative employees because they were basically the majority of the target population.

**Department**

The study also aimed at determining the department that the participants worked in from the WSP. The results are shown in table 4 below.

**Table 4: Department**

Department		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Administration	15	11.4
	Procurement	8	6.1
	Human Resource	6	4.5
	Accounts	13	9.8
	Commercial	29	22.0
	Technical	61	46.2
	Total	132	100.0

Source: Researcher, 2022

The findings indicated that, 11.4% belonged to the Administration department while 6.1 % were working for the procurement department. The results manifested that 4.5% of the participants were working for human resource management department. Further results appropriated that 9.8% of the participants were working for the accounts department and 22.0% were working for the commercial department. Lastly, the results indicated that 46.2 % of the participants were for the technical department. Looking through the results the majority of the respondents were working for the technical department as shown by 46.2%. The results indicated that the sector

employs higher percentage of the technical employees including plumbers, water service operators, line patrollers, chemical attendants, meter readers among others.

**Years worked in the WSP**

The study aimed at finding out the period that the respondents had worked in the WSP. The results are presented in the table 5 below.

**Table 5: Years Worked in the WSP**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Less than 2	12	9.1
2-5	39	29.5
6-10	55	41.7
Above 10	26	19.7
Total	132	100.0

**Source: Researcher, 2022**

The findings revealed that 9.1% of the respondents had worked in the WSP for less than 2 years, 29.5% had worked for between 2-5 years, 41.7% had worked for between 6 and 19.7% of the respondents had worked in the WSP for a period of above 10 years. According to the findings larger percentage of the respondents had at least worked for the WSP for a period of 10 years and above. This shows that there is a high level of employee retention

**Effects of employee engagement on operation efficiency**

Descriptive results are shown in table 6 below.

**Table 6: Employee Engagement**

Statement	1		2		3		4		5		Mean	Std. Dev.
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Employees are consulted during formulation and implementation of WSP's strategies	20	15.2	20	15.2	18	13.6	43	32.6	31	23.5	3.34	1.386
Senior management delegates some of their duties to their juniors.	14	10.6	13	9.8	19	14.4	56	42.4	30	22.7	3.57	1.243
There is good relation between the management and the union.	8	6.1	14	10.6	25	18.5	63	47.7	22	16.7	3.58	1.077
Employee engagement affects operation efficiency of the WSP.	4	3	4	3	14	10.6	69	52.3	41	31.1	4.05	0.902
<b>Average</b>											<b>3.635</b>	<b>1.152</b>

**Source: Researcher, 2022**

The results in the table 6 above express that most of the participants were impartial with the statement that the employees are consulted during formulation and implementation of WSP's strategies as shown with a mean of 3.34. According to the results, the respondents also concurred with the statement that the senior management delegates some of their duties to their juniors as shown with a mean of 3.57. The respondents also concurred with the statement that there is good relation between the management and the union as indicated with a mean 3.58. Finally, the outcome also implied that the participants were in concurrence with the assertion that

employee engagement affects operation efficiency of the WSP. Nevertheless, the responses were not diversified from the mean as expressed by a standard deviation of 1.152.

The findings also indicated that employee engagement has a strong positive linear association with operation efficiency ( $r=0.632$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). These findings agree with Antony (2018) who indicated that an organization with an engaged workforce has an edge over competition due to factors like improved productivity and increased efficiency.

The regression analysis was done to determine the relationship between the independent variable (employee engagement) and dependent variable (operation efficiency) Model Fitness results were as presented in the table 7.

**Table 7: Model Fitness  
Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.703 <sup>a</sup>	.494	.478	.766

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Engagement

**Source: Researcher, 2022**

The R -square associated with the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable is 0.494. This means employee engagement practices can explain 49% of the variations of dependent variable which was operation efficiency.

Further, the results also showed that there was a positive significant relationship between employee engagement and operation efficiency ( $\beta=0.458$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The results agreed with Turner, (2019) who posits that having engaged employees play a significant role in an organization as it results in a strategic advantage through higher production and increased innovation hence efficiency. The findings therefore, implied that employee engagement had a significant effect on operation efficiency of water service providers in Meru County.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings exhibited that most respondents agreed that the employees are consulted during the formulation and implementation of WSP's strategies; hence they are actively involved in the process. The findings also implied that most respondents agreed that senior management delegates some of their duties to their juniors. The outcomes further suggested that most participants concurred that there is a good relationship between the water service providers' management and the workers' union. Lastly, outcomes implied that most of the respondents opined that employee engagement affects the operational efficiency of the Water service providers of Meru County.

Correlation results showed that employee engagement had a strong positive linear association with operational efficiency. Regression of coefficients showed a positive and significant relationship between employee engagement and operational efficiency. From the results of hypothesis testing, employee engagement had statistical significance on the operational efficiency of water service providers in Meru County, Kenya.

The study recommended that the WSPs should empower their employees through capacity building and improve their abilities through mentorship programs. The water service providers should be at the forefront in enhancing their employees' skills through training because technology keeps on changing hence customer expectations too. The employees ought to be taken for benchmarking to learn more from other water service providers who perform better than them in the national ranking.

The study also recommended that the employees are involved in the strategy formulation and implementation process so that they don't feel like strategies are imposed on them. The WSPs' senior management should delegate some of their duties to junior staff to empower them for future leadership. There should also be a good relationship between the WSPs management and the union for better welfare of the team and development of the company.

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