

**PERCEPTION OF GEMBA KAIZEN'S UPPER MANAGEMENT
COMMITMENT PRINCIPLE ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN KENYA
WILDLIFESERVICE, TSAVO EAST NATIONAL PARK, KENYA**

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Abstract

Harnessing human capital and converting it into useful industrial processes can best be realized through competent management systems. However, without significant commitment from the upper management as espoused in the Gemba Kaizen principles, strategies to improve employee performance may fall short of their objectives. Gemba Kaizen principles have been adopted in several private and public sector organizations globally, and the upper management commitment principle is being subsequently practiced in the organizations. However, the influence of the application of the Gemba Kaizen upper management commitment principle on employee performance has not received significant research attention previously. Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the application of GembaKaizen'supper management commitment principle on employee performance in Kenya Wildlife Service, Tsavo East National Park, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design targeting employees of Kenya Wildlife Service, Tsavo East National Park. Data collected through pre-tested copies of questionnaire from 202 respondentsrevealed that the Gemba Kaizenupper management commitment principlesignificantly influenced employee performance in the Kenya Wildlife Service. There was a significant linear relationship between the Kaizen Principle of upper management commitment and employees' understanding the contribution of their role in performance of the organization. Employees increase their outputs if the top management is committed by communicating the importance of meeting regulatory requirements, establishing the quality policy, ensuring that quality objectives are established, conducting management reviews and ensuring the availability of resources. It is, therefore, recommended that the upper management in the Kenya Wildlife Service begin inculcating the need for team effort and customer satisfaction among employees for the achievement of organizational objectives.

Keywords: Gemba Kaizen, Upper management commitment, Employee performance, Customer satisfaction

1.0 Introduction

In recent times, majority of the organizations globally are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of employee performance. Increasing employee performance or to determine the methods through which high level of employees' performance can be achieved is emerging as an important decisive factors for any organization's success. As such, the employee management has gradually become central to managerial systems. The employees' performance is in turn being leveraged on the management systems and competence. Basically, the management's mission is to get people together to accomplish corporate goals and objectives by using available resources efficiently and effectively. Manpower performance can be increased by putting efforts to factors that enhance the employees' motivational level, creativity, job satisfaction and comfort workplace environment, etc. Moreover, Brewster (2007) explains that employees are resources in organizations, and as such they need to be trained and developed properly in order to achieve an organization's goals and expectations. This harnessing human capital and converting it into useful industrial processes can best be realized through competent management systems (Rahmanian & Rahmatinejad, 2014). Further, low workplace productivity affects the overall efficiency and performance of the organization and has, therefore, become of great importance to every organization and no management can afford to let nature take its course (Kamau, 2013). The loss of workers and productive time cannot be separated from other impacts such as loss of morale and increased costs (Kibet, 2010).

Gemba Kaizen is a Japanese concept of continuous improvement designed to enhance organizational processes while reducing wastage of resources. Gemba Kaizen has emerged as a philosophy of management that plays a significant role in undergirding other managerial practices such as the achievement of Total Quality Management (TQM). The popular meaning of Gemba Kaizen is continual, incremental improvement of all aspects of a company (Imai, 1986). As such, Gemba Kaizen is based on making changes anywhere improvements can be made and is anchored on five principles (Zayko, Broughman & Hancock, 1997). One of the key concepts of Kaizen is the pursuit of operation excellence through a housekeeping technique known as the 'five Ss'. The Kaizen Institute recommends the 'five Ss' are a good place for an organization to start when introducing the concept, as it allows all employees to get involved. *Seiri* – or sort – is the first 'S'. This deals with the literal contents of the Gemba, removing any items which are excess to requirements to create a more streamlined working area. Next comes *seiton*, meaning to set things in order, when a system is introduced giving every item its own place, meaning the tools necessary for work are easily accessible – reducing wasted time. *Seiso*, translated to mean scrub, is the third 'S'. The S does not simply relate to keeping a workplace in a clean, but also taking pride in keeping things in order.

Seiketsu refers to the standardization of processes throughout the workplace. The Kaizen Institute further explains that visual management is an important aspect to facilitate easy understanding of these standards. The final S is *shitsuki* which refers to sustaining the changes which have been made in the organization. According to Gupta and Jain (2014), the Gemba Kaizen principles require that the management clearly diagnose a problem within the organization and take immediate action to resolve the problem as the only way of showing others that a change is required. They are also required to standardize the solution of the problem as a prescription when it has been successfully implemented. One such area is employee performance which, unlike other performance parameters in the organization, is highly variable and, therefore, needs to be reinforced. Further, both Kaizen philosophy and TQM processes demand empowered employees, team players and cross-functional activities (Thessaloniki, 2006).

Being largely service oriented, the non-manufacturing sectors depend heavily on the employees as the main production input. The key question, however, remains as to how upper management support influences employee management practices espoused by Gemba Kaizen unto standardization and improved performance. Upper management support is deemed as being very instrumental in the human resource practices of the organization despite the fact that for the most part it is concerned with strategic issues rather than operational issues. Upper management support plays a critical role in any key business decision and commitment from top management may be the most critical factor in the success of any programmes. Consequently, the success of any critical decision made in an organization is highly dependent on top management support and commitment (Zakuan et al., 2012). The top management must play a leading role by making available the critical resources, establishing an organization wide quality policy that is well communicated to all stakeholders, establishing a quality management structure and managing the entire process through close monitoring and evaluation. This must be supported by an organization culture and climate of open cooperation and teamwork among stakeholders in quality management (Sharp et al., 2000). However, the influence of upper management on employee performance is still not fully understood and more so in the context of Gemba Kaizen philosophy management. The Kaizen principles do implicitly reference the upper management commitment as a principle for continuous improvement and, as such, it is clear that the upper management must somehow get involved in the actualization of the Gemba Kaizen processes or at least be supportive of the Gemba Kaizen practices in order for them to succeed in the organization. It was, therefore, imperative to carry out a contextual examination of upper management support of the Gemba Kaizen practices specifically in relation to employee performance focusing on the KWS.

A substantial part of Kenya's economy is leveraged on tourism and wildlife is one of the core products of tourism generating significant revenue from both international and domestic tourists. The country's wildlife which is concentrated in the National Parks and

Game Reserves is managed almost entirely by the KWS. It conserves and manages Kenya's wildlife for the Kenyan people and the world. It is a state corporation that was established by an Act of Parliament (Cap 376), now repealed by WCMA (2013), with the mandate to conserve and manage wildlife in Kenya, and to enforce related laws and regulations. KWS undertakes conservation and management of wildlife resources across all protected areas systems in collaboration with stakeholders. According to KWS report of 2016, KWS performs a number of functions that have both direct impact to the economic performance and other indirect benefits like environmental checks. The mandate of KWS include among others, to: Conserve and manage National Parks, wildlife conservation areas, and sanctuaries under its jurisdiction; Provide security for wildlife and visitors in National Parks, wildlife conservation areas and sanctuaries; Promote or undertake commercial and other activities for the purpose of achieving sustainable wildlife conservation; Collect revenue and charges due to the national government from wildlife and, as appropriate, develop mechanisms for benefit sharing with communities living in wildlife areas; Advise the cabinet ministry on matters pertaining to wildlife policy, strategy and legislation; Coordinate the preparation and implementation of ecosystem plans; Prepare and implement National Park management plans. KWS manages most of the National Parks and Reserves in Kenya, among this being the Tsavo East National Park which is situated in TaitaTaveta County in the coastal region of the country.

A report by KWS (2016) has shown that the body adopted Kaizen strategy in 2010; a strategy that was proposed in 2007. The strategy has been implemented in all National Parks in Kenya. The strategy was adopted after a delegation of top strategic managers visited Japan and China respectively. The strategy was aimed at changing the performance of KWS after the sector lost abruptly during the 2007/2008 post-election violence. KWS (2010) indicates that a number of principles suggested by Gemba Kaizen have been adopted across the various departments of KWS among them top management involvement. However, the effect of upper management support on employee performance resulting from the Gemba Kaizen principles has not been explicitly determined in the organization. Therefore, the present study sought to examine the application of Gemba Kaizen's upper management commitment principle on employee performance in KWS focusing on Tsavo East National Park, Kenya. Therefore, the objective of the present study was to examine the application of Gemba Kaizen's upper management commitment principle on employee performance in KWS focusing on Tsavo East National Park, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Upper Echelons Theory

Towards the end of the last century, academic interest began to greatly increase in the top management of organizations. A key theory that has accompanied and most likely

fostered this upsurge in interest in top managers is Upper Echelons Theory (Carpenter et al. 2004; Finkelstein et al. 2009; Nielsen 2010). The theory was originated by Hambrick and Mason (1984) who derived the idea that managerial characteristics can be used to (partially) predict organizational outcomes based on the notion that the choices of top managers are influenced by their cognitive base and their values. The fundamental idea of this theory is captured well by the subheading of Hambrick and Mason's (1984) seminal paper on the upper echelons perspective: the organization is a reflection of its top managers (the so-called "upper echelons"). The theory acknowledges that individual top managers heavily influence organizational outcomes by the choices they make, which are - in turn - affected by the managers' characteristics.

Hambrick and Mason (1984) further postulated that the characteristics of the upper echelons and their strategic choices help to explain an organization's performance. Hambrick and Mason (1984) added that both the characteristics and strategic choices of upper echelons may be influenced by the situational characteristics of the organization, such as external environment or firm characteristics, which are thus antecedents to managerial characteristics and/or organizational outcomes (Carpenter et al. 2004; Nielsen 2010). According to upper echelons theory, managerial characteristics also affect organizational performance (such as employee performance in the case of the present paper), either directly or mediated by organizational outcomes (Hambrick & Mason 1984).

Hambrick (2007) later suggested two moderators of the relationship between managerial characteristics and organizational outcomes – namely managerial discretion and executive job demands – to complement the traditional upper echelon model as proposed in Hambrick and Mason (1984). Managerial discretion refers to the latitude of action top managers enjoy in making strategic choices (Hambrick & Finkelstein 1987; Carpenter et al. 2004; Crossland & Hambrick 2011). The second moderator – executive job demands – refers to the levels of challenge top managers face (Hambrick et al. 2005). However, in the present study focus is not on the actual characteristics of top managers but the collective strategic behaviour of the top management. This follows from Viellechner and Wulf (2010) who in acknowledging the fact that in practice, executives usually collaborate in teams, point out that TMT as the CEO and the group of top executives involved in the strategic decision making for an appropriate response to situations.

Since support in an organization is often a strategic choice by the top management, several theoretical works have emerged to link upper management behaviour to resource and routine support in the organization. König et al. (2008) discussed the influence of several top management team (TMT) variables on the impact of the CEO-framing on resource commitment. So far, failure in resource allocation served as primary explanation for incumbent inertia. Incumbent inertia, defined as the inability to enact internal change in the face of significant external change (Ghemawat 1991;

Gilbert 2005). Gilbert unbundled inertia into two distinct categories, namely resource rigidity (failure to change resource investment patterns) and routine rigidity (failure to change organizational processes using those resources) (Gilbert, 2005). Both categories constrain an adequate response, but feature different causal mechanisms. Gilbert focused his research on cognitive frames, especially the framing of the innovation as threat vs. opportunity. In his work, threat perception was associated with negative focus, emphasis on loss and sense of a lack of control. In contrast, positive focus as well as terms like gain or in control was associated with opportunity perception (Gilbert, 2005).

König et al. (2008) found that CEO-framing can have a positive influence on organizational resource commitment even if the CEO uses an opportunity framing when communicating with the TMT members. This is counter-intuitive to the theory of Gilbert, who proposed an opportunity frame to overcome routine rigidity, but a threat frame to reduce resource rigidity. The fluidity of resources and routines such as the constant improvement practices espoused by the Gemba Kaizen can only be guaranteed through top management support. Therefore, their cognition of the need for achieving balance between resources and routines in operations is extremely important in realizing the Gemba Kaizen practices in the organization. However, so far previous studies have not linked the upper echelon theory which is premised on strategic choice under conditions of bounded rationality (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and their realization of improved employee performance.

Therefore, in the context of the present study, the Upper Echelons Theory was used to provide insight into whether rewards and recognition practices applied through Gemba Kaizen strategy improved employee performance in the Kenya Wildlife Service.

2.2 Employee Performance

According to Prathap (2011) performance is associated with quantity of output, quality of output, timeliness of output, presence/ attendance on the job, efficiency of the work completed [and] effectiveness of work completed. Aguinis (2009) brings in the employee behavioral aspects on performance explaining that the definition of performance does not include the results of an employee's behaviour, but only the behaviours themselves. Performance is about behaviour or what employees do, not about what employees produce or the outcomes of their work. Perceived employee performance represents the general belief of the employee about his behaviour and contributions in the success of organization. Employee performance may be taken in the perspective of three factors which make possible to perform better than others, determinants of performance may be such as "declarative knowledge", "procedural knowledge" and "motivation" (McCloy et al., 1994). HR practices have positive impact on performance of individuals. Employee Performance is the successful completion of tasks by a selected individual or individuals, as set and measured by a supervisor or organization, to pre-defined acceptable standards while efficiently and effectively utilizing available resource within a changing environment.

2.3 Upper Management Commitment

Upper management includes individuals and teams that are responsible for making the primary decisions within a company. Personnel considered to be part of a company's upper management are at the top of the corporate ladder and carry a degree of responsibility greater than lower level personnel. Upper management leadership is the degree of which top management sets up objectives and strategies, provides and allocates necessary resources, contributes in quality improvement efforts, and assesses their implementation and performance (Saraph et al, 1989). Fernando, Jain and Tripathy (2020) note that top management is very vital in the performance of manufacturing firms in developing countries. According to him, the top management is charged with the responsibilities of establishing the quality policy, communicating in the organization, establishing quality objectives, conducting management reviews, providing resources and many more. Hosono (2020) argues that organizations increase their outputs if the top management is committed by: communicating to the organization the importance of meeting customer as well as statutory and regulatory requirements; establishing the quality policy; ensuring that quality objectives are established; conducting management reviews; and ensuring the availability of resources.

The commitment of upper management is generally a preliminary point for implementing and practicing quality management (QM) to enhancing performance of an organization (Ahire & Ravichandran, 2001). It is impracticable to adopt QM and improve performance without strong upper management support (Flynn et al, 1995). Top management carries the primary responsibility for commitment to quality and support efforts necessary to successful strategy implementation (Crosby, 1980). Hence, top management is the most critical factor that contributes to successful strategy implementation in the workplace (Ramirez & Looney, 1993; Lewis & Smith, 1994). Previous notable management scholars such as Deming (1986), Crosby (1980), Oakland (1993), Kanji and Baker (1990) and Feigenbaum (1986) pointed the vitality role of top management commitment and leadership in TQM implementation. Top management facilitates employee empowerment and improved levels of job satisfaction through its leadership and commitment to the Total Quality Management (TQM) goal of customer satisfaction by creating an organizational climate that emphasizes total quality and customer satisfaction. Upper management commitment practices are also integral in the Kaizen principles and their impact on organizational performance is increasingly being documented.

2.4 Gemba Kaizen and Organizational Performance

Gemba Kaizen is gaining traction in various management contexts globally with proven results. Studies that have focused on Japanese manufacturing techniques had all

illustrated the importance of Kaizen in the improvement of organizational performance (Liker, 2004; Emiliani, Stec, Grasso & Stodder, 2007). Significant improvements in manufacturing operational performance management was characterized by four key distinct performance dimensions which included; cost/productivity, time/speed, operations flexibility and quality. Others included creativity, innovation and customer satisfaction (Bodek, 2010). In Bangladesh, Gemba Kaizen was piloted for the jute sector to study the potential sub sector growth for export diversification. After six months, four model companies achieved an average of 11% production growth in their spinning sections and machine stoppage reduced by 45.7%. Similarly, in Tunisia on the effect of Kaizen was observed in selected manufacturing firms suggesting that, the number of companies that were able to achieve numerically expressible quality/productivity improvement using existing machinery and equipment was 9 out of 14 companies (64%) in the electrical and electronic sector, and 4 out of 13 (31%) in the food processing sector (Kikuchi, 2009). In the Kenyan manufacturing sector, studies on the Kaizen sustainability and operational performance of manufacturing firms showed promising results related to operational performance when Kaizen practices are sustained (Akoth, 2015).

Noticing the successes of the Kaizen practices in the manufacturing sector, other non-manufacturing sector including public sector organizations have since began adopting the Kaizen practices into their management function in order to improve their performance (Titu, Oprean & Grecu, 2010; Robins, 2012). For instance, the Japanese wildlife sector showed the importance of Kaizen on improvement of organizational performance (Liker, 2004). Organizational performance improvements as a result of Kaizen actions varied from moderate (25-50 %) to important (75-100%) and to degree of high improvements (more than 100%) in Japan's wildlife sector and this can be used to inform the Kenyan case (Upadhaya, Munir & Blount, 2014). In Iran, the Gemba Kaizen strategy has been applied in their wildlife management sector for over 10 years and the results have been continuous improvement in its performance. The country's Ministry of Natural Resources Management- where the fauna and flora falls- announced an increase in net profits from the wildlife sector in 2009 to 2012 as a result of radical changes that included the adoption of the continuous improvement strategy. Similarly, the Gemba Kaizen has been applied in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which has been among the top destination for tourists and other businessmen in recent years. According to Titu, Oprean and Grecu (2010), the adoption of the continuous improvement strategy proposed by Gemba Kaizen by the wildlife management department of UAE has led to increased prevention of wildlife destruction, over exploitation and mismanagement. This has led to increased returns from the flora and fauna of the country and consequently increased protection. These gains are associated with the positive effects of Kaizen.

Another similar study by UNEP (2013) targeting twenty wildlife management agencies in East Africa (Tsavo included) in 2012 showed that the performance of a number of these organizations has been positive since there was continuous

improvement, open communication, employees involvement and customers focus. The government of the United Republic of Tanzania with the support from the government of Japan initiated Kaizen project in the country as one of strategic intervention for supporting and promoting manufacturing sector growth and other sectors of the economy beginning 2013. According to Gordian (2014), the other sectors included in the country were tourism management, wildlife management and environmental conservation and management. The Kaizen led continuous improvement strategy resulted in increased returns from the tourism sector between 2014 and 2015 by 11.1%; more specifically in Arusha that shares the Tsavo wildlife ecosystem, the Shinyanga and the Kigoma that are blessed with numerous plants and animals species (Koch, 2015). In Kenya, Otundo (2014) found that as a result of adopting the Kaizen strategy by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), it achieved cost saving of about 6.12% in the year 2010 and 2012. As such, there are a number of benefits an organization like the KWS stands to gain by implementing Kaizen strategy.

2.5 Gemba Kaizen Rewards, Upper Management Commitment Principle and the Performance of Kenya Wildlife Service

Fariba and Ziba (2013) did a study on the impact of Kaizen implementation on performance of manufacturing companies' staff and revealed that the role of upper management commitment is very important in allocating resources, giving direction of leadership, sourcing for resources and mobilizing resources that can help an organization perform better. If management makes positive use of the process-oriented way of thinking to support innovation and further reinforces it with a Kaizen approach, it will find that the company's overall competitiveness will be improved in the long run (Rezaeian, 2014). The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) (2015) did a study on the importance of having top management effectively set the objectives and communicate the intentions of the Kaizen strategy implementation in Wildlife management agencies in Kenya as recommended by the strategic plan of 2012/2017. According to the report, by providing continuous feedback to employees, management will ensure that suggestions will continue, even if a few aren't accepted. Without clear communication from management, employees will eventually become discouraged and employee's suggestions for improvement will decrease dramatically.

In the same vein, a report by KWS (2014) revealed that there was need for involvement of the top management in various ways in ensuring the protection and management strategy of 2012/2017 success in Kenya. This was because the top management is very vital in setting out policies, mobilizing resources, allocating resources and giving general direction on the expected performance of the organization. According to the report, the strategy shall be successful if the top management is involved in all levels. As such, the report concluded that, senior managers play a crucial role in the success of continual improvement programmes. Without the leadership,

commitment and involvement of senior management, a continual improvement programme was unlikely to be successful. However, the report did not explicitly link upper management commitment to Gemba Kaizen principles with employee performance. Therefore, this paper sought to examine the application of Gemba Kaizen principles in relation to upper management commitment on employee performance in the KWS.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design. This design was preferred for this study and seen as the most suitable as it brought out information on attitudes that would be difficult to measure using observational techniques. Descriptive research design has been used variously to investigate employee performance in organizations; among these studies are Shahzadi, Javed, Pirzada, Nasreen and Khanam (2014) in Pakistan, Falola, Osibanjo and Ojo (2014) in Nigeria, and Ek and Mukuru (2013) and Maina and Kwasira (2015) in Kenya.

3.2 Target Population

The target population of the study was 543 employees at KWS's Tsavo East National Park comprising 470 Rangers/Wardens and 73 Research, Mechanical, Accounts, Procurement and Customer care staff.

3.3 Sample Size and Procedure

A sample size of 238 respondents was computed using the formula proposed by Sudman (1976) thus

$$n = \frac{\left(\frac{P[1-P]}{\frac{A^2}{Z^2} + \frac{P[1-P]}{N}} \right)}{R}$$

Where:

n = sample size required

N = the population

P = estimated variance in population, as a decimal: (0.5 for this study)

A = Precision desired, expressed as a decimal (0.05 for this study)

Z = Based on confidence level: 1.96 for 95% confidence,

R = Estimated Response rate, as a decimal

Application of the above formula to the target population yielded a sample size of 238 respondents.

3.4 Data Collection

Copies of questionnaire developed by the researchers were used to gather primary data. Both open ended and closed ended questions were used. This method was selected for its advantage to increase response rate and importantly as it allowed the enumerators an opportunity to gather richer information by interacting with the respondents. They were pre-tested with 10 respondents from the neighboring Tsavo West National Park to test the reliability and validity of the instruments used in collecting data for the main study. A Cronbach's coefficient Alpha was computed to determine the reliability of the questionnaire from which a Cronbach coefficient $\alpha = 0.7991$ was obtained. This was above 0.70 indicating that items correlated highly among themselves implying high consistency among items measuring the same dimension. Therefore, the instrument was deemed reliable and administered as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Percentages and frequency were used to examine the respondents' basic information. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to give the extent to which Gemba Kaizen strategic principles adopted influenced the performance at Tsavo East National Park. Spearman rank-order correlation was also used to evaluate the monotonic relationship between the ordinal variables.

4.0 Results and Analysis

Of the 238 targeted respondents 202 responded by returning filled copies of questionnaire representing 85% response rate. This was considered adequate to constitute a valid basis for conclusion.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate the time they have been working as employees of KWS Tsavo East National Park, the departments worked in, the positions served and the levels of education. The results were given as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Summary of Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
1. Education Levels of the Respondents		
Secondary education	112	55.6
Diploma	37	18.2
Degree	20	10.1
Others	33	16.1
2. Number of years		
less than one year	29	14.3
1 to 4 years	66	32.8
5 to 9 years	61	30.4
10 to 14 years	30	14.7
above 15 years	16	7.8
3. Departments Served		
Wardens/ Rangers	162	80.2
Accounting and procurement	10	5.1
Research	8	3.9
Mechanical	12	6.1
Customer care	9	4.7
4. Positions Served at KWS Tsavo East		
Junior employee	93	45.9
Middle level management	61	30.4
Subordinate	42	20.8
Top management	6	2.9

N=202

(Source: Author, 2020)

The findings in Table 1 indicate that majority (63.2%) of the respondents have worked at KWS Tsavo National Park for between 1 and 9 years meaning that they understand better the strategic principles adopted by KWS over time. Majority of the respondents in this study worked as wardens/rangers as represented by 80.2% suggesting that most of the employees in the KWS were mostly security officers (wardens/ rangers). Further, the findings indicate that majority of the respondents were junior employees and middle level managers represented by 45.9% and as such were recipients of the rewards and recognition schemes by the management. Majority of the respondents had secondary level of education (55.6%) and a diploma (18.2%). This was followed by those employees with a degree (10.1%) while the remaining had other education qualification (16.1%) that included masters and certificates. This trend was due to the fact that most rangers who participated in the research are recruited with a secondary school certificate while others had enrolled for some diploma courses.

4.2 Influence of Kaizen Principle of Upper Management Commitment on Employee Performance

The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the view that the Gemba Kaizen’s Upper Management Commitment principle influenced employee performance at KWS’s Tsavo East National Park. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Application of Kaizen Principle of Reward and Recognition on Organization Performance

Gemba Kaizen Principle (n = 278)	Mean	S.Dev
Upper management supports Kaizen Principles on Customer Satisfaction in our organization	3.52	1.03
Upper management supports Kaizen Principles on Internal Business Process in our organization	3.35	1.08
Upper management supports Kaizen Principles on Learning and Growth in our organization	3.70	1.20
Upper management supports Kaizen Principles on Financial performance in our organization	3.85	1.04
Aggregate	3.605	1.088

Results in Table 2 suggest that the respondents perceived the application of GembaKaizen’s Upper Management Commitment principles having the highest effect on Financial Performance (M = 3.85, SD=1.04) in the organization. This was followed by the effect on Learning and Growth (M=3.70, SD=1.2) and Customer satisfaction (M=3.52, SD=1.03) respectively in that order. However, the Upper Management Commitment principle had the least perceived effect on Internal Business Processes (M=3.35, SD=1.08). Further, the aggregate mean (M = 3.605) is high suggesting majority of the respondents agreed with the view that GembaKaizen’s Upper Management Commitment principle influenced employee performance at KWS’s Tsavo East National Park. The standard deviation is, however, not very different from 1 suggesting that while there were variations in opinions on this subject, most tended to revolve around the mean.

4.3 Correlation of Kaizen Principle of Upper Management Commitment on Employee Performance

The independent variable was the Kaizen Upper Management Commitment principle and was correlated against the dependent variables from the appraisal information. Spearman's R correlation was carried out to determine if there was a reliable relationship. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Principle of Upper Management Commitment on Employee Performance

Variable	Correlation	Sign
Independent Variable		
Upper Management Commitment		
Dependent Variable		
Respondent is a team player	0.061	(0.316)
Respondent has integrity	0.182	(0.031)*
Respondent understands the importance of customer satisfaction	0.053	(0.382)
Respondent understands the contribution of their role in performance of the organization	0.114	(0.045)*
N=202		

* Significant at <5%

The results in Table 3 indicate that there was a significant linear relationship between the Kaizen Principle of upper management commitment and employee's integrity ($r = 0.182$; $p < 0.05$). There was also a significant linear relationship between the Kaizen Principle of upper management commitment and employee's understanding the contribution of their role in performance of the organization ($r = 0.114$; $p < 0.05$). However, upper management commitment did not significantly influence other attributes of employee performance such as teamwork ($p > 0.05$) and their understanding of the importance of customer satisfaction ($p > 0.05$). Overall, this means that upper management commitment principle significantly influenced the performance of KWS employees in Tsavo East National Park. These findings agree with the report by KWS (2014) which revealed that there was need for involvement of the top management in various ways in ensuring the protection and management strategy of 2012/2017 succeed in Kenya. This was because the top management is very vital in setting out policies, mobilizing resources, allocating resources and giving general direction on the expected performance of the organization. According to the report, the strategy shall be successful if the top management is involved in all levels.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

The aim of this study was to establish the influence of the application of Gemba Kaizen upper management commitment principle on employee performance of KWS using Tsavo East National Park, Kenya as case study. This was meant to fill the gap occasioned by the observation that studies on the application of Gemba Kaizen upper management commitment principle had not established its links with employee performance in several organizations including the KWS. Therefore, looking at the results in the previous section, it was evident that upper management commitment principle significantly influenced the performance of KWS employees in Tsavo East National Park. This in turn

reflected mostly on financial performance ($M = 3.85$, $SD=1.04$) and Learning and Growth ($M=3.70$, $SD=1.2$) in the organization.

These results support the view of Crosby (1979) that top management carries the primary responsibility for commitment to quality and support efforts necessary to successful strategy implementation. Hence, the most critical factor contributing to successful strategy implementation in the workplace is top management (Ramirez & Looney, 1993; Lewis & Smith, 1994). Consequently, the success of any critical decision made in an organization is highly dependent on top management support and commitment (Zakuan et al., 2012). However, contrary to Hosono (2012), the influence of upper management was not reflected on employee understanding the importance of customer satisfaction. In other words, the upper management was not effectively communicating customer importance to the employees in order to align their performance practices to customer satisfaction.

Further, it was evident that the Kaizen Principle of upper management commitment had the most profound influence on employee's integrity ($r = 0.182$; $p < 0.05$). According to the World Wildlife Fund (2015) by providing continuous feedback to employees on their suggestions, management will ensure that suggestions will continue, even if a few aren't accepted. This is a measure of integrity that should be communicated to the employees and without clear communication from management, employees will eventually become discouraged and employee's suggestions for improvement will decrease dramatically. In addition, the findings support those of KWS (2014) which reported that without the leadership, commitment and involvement of senior management in all levels, a continual improvement programme was unlikely to be successful, that is, the processes will lack the integrity demanded. Therefore, the commitment of the upper management was important in ensuring that there was integrity in the operations and that the same was communicated to the employees.

The Kaizen Principle of upper management commitment also significantly influenced the employee's understanding the contribution of their role in performance of the organization ($r = 0.114$; $p < 0.05$). These findings agree with Hosono (2020) who asserted that organizations increase their outputs if the top management is committed by communicating to the organization the importance of meeting regulatory requirements; establishing the quality policy; ensuring that quality objectives are established; conducting management reviews; and ensuring the availability of resources. They also agree with Fariba and Ziba (2013) whose study on the impact of Kaizen implementation on performance of manufacturing companies' staff and revealed that the role of upper management commitment is very important in allocating resources, giving direction of leadership, sourcing for resources and mobilize resources that can help an organization perform better. Essentially, these two previous findings point to the importance of the upper management in communicating value to the employees on their roles in the

organization and the expectations the organization had on them not just as employees but as members contributing to the mission of the organization.

Theoretically, these findings support the views of Viellechner and Wulf (2010) who acknowledge the fact that in practice, executives usually collaborate in teams, and that TMT as the CEO and the group of top executives often come together in the strategic decision making for an appropriate response to situations. This shows that apart from the traditional view of Hambrick and Mason (1984) that managerial characteristics be viewed through their demographics of background characteristics in order to understand their strategic behaviour, their group characteristics as the Upper Echelon of the firm can also be well used to explain their strategic decision making. Therefore, this can overcome the traditional strategic responses of individual managers, that is, managerial discretion and executive job demands hypothesized by Hambrick and Mason (1984). Second, the top management framing in resource commitment of the organization (KWS) was found to be important in ensuring routine consistency which is important in the realization of the Gemba Kaizen constant improvement strategy in the organization. This was in agreement with König et al. (2008) views on top management team (TMT) and CEO-framing on resource commitment. However, contrary to Gilbert (2005), it shows that collective strategic behaviour by the top management can lead to better resource-routine balance as opposed to one being achieved at the expense of the other.

6.0 Conclusion

From the study's findings, it can be concluded that, the application of Gemba Kaizen upper management commitment principle, the KWS was important in shaping employees' perception of service through integrity and understanding their contributions to the performance of the organization. This affected their performance mostly in terms of Financial Performance and Learning and Growth in the organization. However, the upper management did not significantly influence teamwork among employees and also did not emphasize customer satisfaction. These present areas of focus of managerial behaviour in the organization in the future. Thus, based on the foregoing findings and discussion, the study concludes that application of the Gemba Kaizen upper management commitment principle was an influential factor in employee performance in the KWS.

7.0 Recommendations

In regard to the evidence found in this study on the Gemba Kaizen upper management commitment principle on employee performance, the study recommends that the upper management in the KWS begin inculcating the need for team effort among employees for the achievement of organizational objectives. In the same vein, the upper management should commit to train the employees of the organization on the value of customer satisfaction so as to improve the customer experience when interacting with the KWS.

7.1 Suggestions for Further Research

The research recommends that future research should be undertaken in other KWS Parks like Tsavo West, Amboseli and many more to examine the extent to which Gemba Kaizen upper management commitment principles have been adopted and their influence on performance. There is also need for research to examine each individual Gemba Kaizen strategic principle and the performance of organizations in the wildlife protection sector.

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