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COACHING AS A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS: A CASE OF MURANG'A COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the role of coaching as a strategic tool for improving employee performance in devolved government systems, focusing on the County Government of Murang'a. Globally, coaching has emerged as a strategic human resource development approach that enhances employee self-awareness, skills, and goal attainment. However, in Kenya's devolved governments, limited empirical evidence exists on how structured coaching influences performance outcomes. The research adopted a descriptive research design to assess the nature and impact of coaching practices on employee performance. The target population comprised 1,022 management-level county employees, from which a sample of 287 respondents was selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS Version 20, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. Reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.7. Findings revealed that coaching had a strong positive and statistically significant relationship with employee performance ($r = 0.753$, $p < 0.05$) and accounted for 56.7% of performance variation ($R^2 = 0.567$). Coaching was found to enhance job satisfaction, skills development, teamwork, and goal achievement among county employees. The results supported Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, demonstrating that guided learning and feedback improve self-efficacy and organizational effectiveness. The study recommends institutionalizing coaching within county performance management frameworks, training supervisors as workplace coaches, and allocating resources for continuous coaching programs. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to explore the long-term impact of coaching on performance and examine its interaction with other learning mechanisms such as mentoring and peer learning.

Keywords: *Coaching, employee performance, social cognitive theory, Muranga, County*

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, governments are increasingly adopting strategic human resource practices such as coaching to improve performance, accountability, and innovation in the public sector. Coaching has emerged as a practical leadership and capacity-building approach that enables employees to develop self-awareness, enhance their skills, and achieve performance goals aligned with institutional objectives. According to the World Bank (2023), global public sector reforms that emphasize coaching and continuous learning have contributed to more efficient, citizen-oriented governance systems. Countries such as Singapore and New Zealand have embedded coaching into their civil

service leadership frameworks, resulting in improved productivity and employee engagement. Similarly, in Canada, structured coaching programs have been used to strengthen managerial capacity and foster a culture of collaboration and performance excellence within the public service. These examples underscore the transformative potential of coaching as a strategic human capital development tool.

Regionally, many African governments are recognizing coaching as a means of addressing leadership and performance challenges in the public sector. Rwanda, for instance, has integrated coaching into its public service reforms, helping to nurture high-performing civil servants and reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies (Chemouni, 2020). South Africa's National School of Government has also institutionalized coaching programs to enhance leadership effectiveness and accountability across departments (Molefe, 2021). Despite these efforts, numerous African countries still face difficulties in embedding coaching within formal management systems due to limited resources, weak institutional support, and inadequate training frameworks (Okeke-Uzodike & Sholanke, 2022). Consequently, the impact of coaching on public sector performance in Africa remains uneven and underexplored.

In Kenya, effective employee performance in the public sector is a critical driver of service delivery and economic development. The Vision 2030 blueprint emphasizes the need for a professional, accountable, and results-oriented public service capable of implementing devolved functions efficiently (Government of Kenya, 2020). To achieve this, county governments have introduced various capacity development initiatives such as workshops, training sessions, and mentoring programs. However, many of these interventions have not yielded the expected outcomes, partly because they are one-off events that do not provide sustained behavioural change or measurable performance improvement. Coaching, unlike traditional training, focuses on continuous engagement, feedback, and goal-oriented learning that directly links employee growth to organizational outcomes (Grant, 2021). When applied strategically, coaching can help county employees identify performance barriers, improve problem-solving skills, and enhance motivation and accountability.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The County Government of Murang'a, like many devolved units in Kenya, faces persistent challenges in achieving consistent employee performance. Reports highlight issues such as bureaucratic inefficiency, low motivation, and limited managerial capacity as barriers to effective service delivery (Njiru, 2021). Although the county has introduced several training programs, their impact has remained minimal due to irregular implementation, poor follow-up, and a lack of personalized development support. Evidence from the Kenya School of Government (2022) shows that only 37% of county employees have participated in any structured professional development activity over the last three years, compared to 68% of national government employees. This disparity reflects a systemic gap in how counties approach human capital development, particularly the absence of structured coaching frameworks tailored to their operational realities. While national institutions have made strides in embedding coaching within leadership development, county governments such as Murang'a still lack structured, evidence-based strategies for coaching as a performance enhancement tool.

Conceptually, there remains limited empirical understanding of how coaching, as a distinct component of management development, contributes to measurable improvements in employee performance within devolved systems. Most local studies treat training and development as a general construct without disaggregating the specific contribution of coaching (Kariuki & Wanyoike, 2019). As a result, there is little clarity on how coaching interventions influence goal attainment, accountability, and service efficiency among county government employees. Methodologically, existing studies often rely on self-reported data and small, non-representative samples that limit generalizability. Furthermore, they fail to distinguish between different cadres of employees—such as frontline service providers and administrative officers—whose coaching needs and performance indicators differ significantly. This lack of contextualized, empirical evidence has limited the capacity of devolved governments to design effective coaching frameworks that enhance performance outcomes.

The persistence of performance inefficiencies in devolved governments therefore, calls for a more strategic approach to employee development, one that is continuous, personalized, and performance-driven. Coaching provides such a framework by promoting accountability, feedback, and the transfer of learning to daily work tasks (Whitmore, 2017). This study is designed to fill the empirical and contextual gaps identified by examining how coaching functions as a strategic tool for improving employee performance in the County Government of Murang'a. Specifically, it seeks to establish the nature of coaching practices within the county, assess their impact on employee performance, and provide evidence-based recommendations for integrating coaching into public sector management systems.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study was to evaluate how coaching contributes to improving employee performance in the County Government of Murang'a. The study's findings are expected to contribute to the theoretical understanding of performance improvement through continuous learning and coaching frameworks. Practically, the results will assist county governments and policymakers in formulating structured coaching programs that enhance productivity, motivation, and accountability among public servants. Additionally, the study provides a basis for embedding coaching within the broader human resource management policies of devolved governments, thereby supporting sustainable performance improvement across Kenya's counties.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory, advanced by Becker (1964) and Mincer (1974), posits that employees' skills, knowledge, and competencies constitute a form of capital that can be enhanced through targeted investment in development activities such as coaching. When organizations invest in employee development, they strengthen their workforce's capacity to deliver improved performance and contribute to institutional goals. Coaching aligns with this theory by enabling continuous learning, reflection, and performance improvement through individualized feedback and support.

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura (1977), highlights that learning is a social process in which individuals acquire new behaviors and competencies by observing others. In the context of coaching, this theory underscores the importance of modeling, mentorship, and guided practice, where employees learn through observation, imitation, and feedback from experienced colleagues or supervisors.

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical studies consistently reveal that coaching significantly contributes to improved employee performance by enhancing motivation, accountability, and job competence. Wahome and Ogolla (2021) conducted a study at Tetra Pak Limited in Kenya and established a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.696$, $p < 0.05$) between coaching and employee performance. They found that employees who regularly received coaching demonstrated higher productivity and improved goal attainment. The study emphasized aligning coaching objectives with employee interests to foster long-term performance improvement.

Similarly, Bweng'i (2015) explored coaching practices and their relationship with employee performance in Kenyan organizations. The study revealed that regular coaching led to notable improvements in key performance indicators over four years, though limited coaching skills among managers and employee resistance posed challenges. The author concluded that coaching plays a vital role in improving organizational success through enhanced workplace relationships and motivation.

In Indonesia, Nuryanti, Masharyono, and Fauziatunisa (2018) examined the influence of coaching on employee performance in the hospitality industry and found that coaching accounted for 60.6% of performance variations. The study highlighted that consistent coaching practices improved task quality and innovation. Similarly, Rop and Cherotich (2023), in a study conducted in Kenya's healthcare sector, established that coaching significantly enhances employee effectiveness and service quality, recommending increased investment in structured coaching initiatives.

A related study by Sidhu and Nizam (2020) in Malaysia examined how coaching interacts with rewards and recognition to influence performance. Their regression analysis showed that coaching directly improved employee performance by 31.8% and indirectly through rewards and recognition by 63.5%. This study emphasized integrating motivational factors into coaching frameworks to maximize impact. Collectively, these studies affirm that coaching is an essential component of employee development and performance improvement, yet they also indicate gaps in implementation, particularly in public institutions where coaching remains informal and inconsistent.

Summary of Research Gaps

The reviewed literature demonstrates that coaching positively influences employee performance across sectors by improving efficiency, motivation, and accountability (Wahome & Ogolla, 2021; Nuryanti et al., 2018; Rop & Cherotich, 2023). However, most studies have been conducted in private sector or developed country contexts, with limited focus on public sector organizations in Kenya's devolved system. Even local studies tend to generalize staff development without isolating the specific contribution of coaching as

a distinct management practice. Moreover, many rely on self-reported data and fail to consider contextual challenges such as resource constraints or organizational culture that affect coaching effectiveness in county governments. Therefore, a clear gap exists in empirical evidence on how structured coaching influences employee performance in Kenya's devolved units. This study sought to address that gap by examining coaching as a strategic tool for enhancing employee performance in the County Government of Murang'a, focusing on context-specific challenges, and implementation dynamics.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

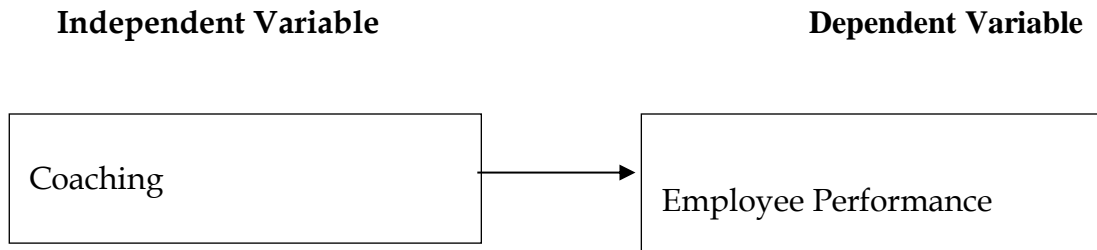


Figure 8: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to systematically examine the existing coaching practices and their influence on employee performance in Murang'a County. This design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect detailed information on the nature and effectiveness of coaching interventions while describing the existing conditions without manipulating any variables. It further facilitated the identification of relationships among variables such as coaching, mentoring, peer learning, and on-the-job learning, which collectively contribute to employee performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population consisted of 1,022 management-level employees drawn from various departments within the County Government of Murang'a. These employees were considered appropriate respondents as they directly experience or are affected by management development initiatives, including coaching programs, which are central to this study. The unit of analysis was the individual employee. To ensure fair representation, the population was stratified by departments, including education, health, water and environment, public service management, and finance, among others.

The study applied a stratified random sampling technique to draw a representative sample from the population. Each department formed a stratum, from which participants were randomly selected. The sample size of 287 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, based on a 5% margin of error. This proportional allocation ensured that all departments were represented according to their relative size, allowing for balanced perspectives across the county. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires containing closed-ended items. Questionnaires were preferred for their ability to generate standardized, quantifiable, and comparable data efficiently and cost-effectively (Kumar, 2020). The tool's design encouraged anonymity, which increased the likelihood of honest responses. Before the main study, a pilot test involving 10% of the sample (29 respondents) from the County Government of Kirinyaga was conducted to test and refine the questionnaire. Feedback from the pilot helped enhance the

instrument's clarity, accuracy, and usability, ensuring that data collected in the main study were valid and reliable.

To ensure validity, the researcher sought expert review from the academic supervisor, whose feedback helped align the questionnaire items with the study variables and objectives. Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which measures internal consistency among questionnaire items. The test was conducted using pilot data in SPSS Version 25, coaching and employee performance recorded alpha coefficients above 0.7. According to Kothari (2014), such values confirm that the instrument items are internally consistent and dependable. After obtaining authorization letters from the Management University of Africa (MUA) and a research permit from the National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), the researcher sought clearance from the Human Resource Department of the County Government of Murang'a. Data were then collected with the assistance of two trained research assistants who distributed and retrieved the questionnaires within agreed timelines.

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency were used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Inferential statistics, specifically correlation and linear regression analysis, were applied to examine the relationships between coaching and employee performance. The regression model adopted for the study was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Employee Performance

X₁ = Coaching

β₁ = Regression Coefficients

ε = Error Term

FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

Coaching and Employee Performance

The objective of the study sought to determine the effect of coaching on employee performance within county governments in Kenya. To achieve this, the study analyzed responses from participants and computed descriptive statistics on both coaching practices and employee performance. The summarized results are presented in Table 1.

Table 35: Coaching and Employee Performance Descriptive Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Coaching has led to an increased rate of work output among employees.	3.28	1.67
Employees have achieved their goals more effectively as a result of coaching.	3.78	0.63
Coaching has improved the skill levels of employees, as evidenced by skill evaluations.	4.12	1.09

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job satisfaction levels among employees have increased due to the coaching received.	4.54	0.23
Participation in team activities has improved following coaching interventions.	3.92	1.32
Performance appraisals and review scores have shown positive changes after employees received coaching.	3.69	1.07
Composite Mean	3.96	

The descriptive analysis in Table 1 revealed that coaching had a positive influence on employee performance in county governments in Kenya, with a composite mean of 3.96, indicating that most respondents agreed with the statements provided. In addition, coaching was strongly associated with skill development, as evidenced by the mean score of 4.12 and a relatively low standard deviation of 1.09, showing general agreement that employees had developed their competencies. These findings resonate with Bozer and Jones (2018), who emphasized that effective coaching equips employees with new skills and enhances their self-efficacy, which are critical drivers of performance. Similarly, local evidence by Wahome and Ogolla (2021) demonstrated that structured performance coaching significantly improved both technical and interpersonal skills of employees in Kenyan firms.

Moreover, the analysis indicated that participation in team activities improved moderately following coaching, with a mean score of 3.92 and a deviation of 1.32, pointing to varied experiences among respondents. This suggests that while some employees embraced collaborative practices, others were less impacted. Consistent with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, coaching provides a platform for observational learning, which strengthens teamwork and cooperation. Comparable results by Rop and Cherotich (2023) in Kenyan hospitals showed that coaching fostered stronger team dynamics and improved organizational productivity through enhanced collaboration. Although coaching was positively linked to goal achievement (mean 3.78, SD 0.63) and improved performance appraisals (mean 3.69, SD 1.07), the relatively lower scores compared to job satisfaction and skills improvement suggest that these outcomes are influenced by additional factors beyond coaching alone. This finding supports earlier research by Cherono, Towett, and Njeje (2016), who noted that mentorship and coaching need to be complemented by effective management systems for employees to consistently meet organizational targets. Furthermore, Kariuki and Wanyoike (2019) observed that county governments require integrated management.

Descriptive Analysis on Employee Performance

The responses were analyzed to capture various dimensions of performance, including quality of work, timeliness, and problem-solving ability. The findings are summarized and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Employee Performance Descriptive Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I achieve my project milestones within the scheduled timelines.	3.85	1.63
The customers I serve generally rate my performance highly.	3.63	0.29
I rarely make errors that require redoing my work.	3.64	0.46
My supervisor consistently gives me high scores in performance reviews.	3.21	0.24
I complete most of my tasks within the expected timeframe.	4.32	0.95
Both my supervisor and peers give me positive performance feedback.	4.02	1.03
Composite Mean		3.93

The analysis of employee performance pointed to generally favorable perceptions regarding work outcomes. A composite mean of 3.93 reflected agreement with expected standards, though opportunities for improvement remained evident. Drawing from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, such perceptions align with the notion of self-efficacy, which influences how individuals approach and accomplish tasks. This suggests that county government employees demonstrate moderate confidence in their capabilities, with performance outcomes shaped by both individual belief and organizational context. When considering specific indicators, task completion within expected timeframes attracted the strongest ratings ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.95$). This highlighted the significance of timeliness as an essential aspect of work delivery, linking effective time management to higher performance. Comparable evidence from Maina and Kinyua (2022) associated timely completion of responsibilities with enhanced training outcomes and organizational results in Kenyan counties, reinforcing the importance of efficiency in shaping positive performance trajectories.

In contrast, the weakest scores emerged from supervisory assessments during performance reviews ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.24$). This pointed to a gap between employee self-perceptions and external evaluations by supervisors. Kariuki and Wanyoike (2019) note that such misalignment between internal and external assessments can reduce motivation and obstruct pathways to continuous improvement. The implication here is that although employees may perceive themselves as competent, formal validation processes may not fully reflect these perceptions, potentially straining confidence and growth opportunities. Peer and informal recognition, however, revealed stronger outcomes, with ratings averaging 4.02 ($SD = 1.03$). This illustrated the influence of collegial support and peer-based encouragement on sustaining workplace motivation. Biswal et al. (2024) similarly observed that peer recognition promotes consistency and motivation in professional settings, highlighting how social reinforcement can complement formal systems of evaluation. Such findings suggest that collective workplace dynamics contribute significantly to maintaining morale, particularly where supervisory reviews may not provide the same reinforcement.

Additional insights showed relatively positive outcomes regarding error minimization ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.46$) and customer satisfaction ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.29$). These dimensions underscored the presence of a performance culture that meets both internal standards and external expectations. Kihara and Muathe (2021) emphasized the role of continuous capacity-building in sustaining service quality and reducing costly errors in the public sector. Thus, while the general picture of employee performance remained favorable, greater alignment between supervisory evaluations and employee self-perceptions could serve as a strategic area for strengthening performance management across county governments.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between on-the-job learning and employee performance. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Employee Performance	Sig. (2-tailed)
Coaching	0.753	0.045

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The findings in Table 2 indicate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between coaching and employee performance ($r = .753$, $p = .045$, $n = 223$), suggesting that effective coaching practices directly enhance how well employees perform in the County Government of Murang'a. When supervisors offer constructive feedback, set clear goals, and hold regular developmental discussions, employees become more confident, motivated, and productive. This aligns with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes that guided learning experiences strengthen self-efficacy, ultimately improving performance. Similarly, Bozer and Jones (2018) found that structured coaching fosters role clarity and continuous improvement, reinforcing the importance of coaching as a vital tool for enhancing performance in public sector organizations.

Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.753	.567	.562	6.971

The model summary in Table 4 indicates that coaching explains 56.7% ($R^2 = .567$) of the variance in employee performance. This suggests that more than half of the variation in employee performance within the County Government of Murang'a can be attributed to the effectiveness of coaching programs. The adjusted R^2 (.562) confirms that the model maintains strong explanatory power even after accounting for sampling error. These results align with findings from Maina and Kinyua (2022), who established that coaching-driven capacity-building initiatives significantly improve productivity in county governments in Kenya.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table 5: ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	24.68	1	24.68	38.72	.000
Residual	45.29	221	2.05		
Total	69.97	222			

The ANOVA results indicate that the model is statistically significant ($F(1, 221) = 38.72, p < .001$), confirming that coaching has a significant predictive effect on employee performance. This means that changes in coaching practices significantly explain differences in employee performance across departments in Murang'a County. These findings resonate with Rop and Cherotich (2023), who found that targeted coaching interventions enhance accountability and service delivery in county governments.

Regression Coefficients

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.057	1.681	–	2.30	.040
Coaching	1.070	.071	.753	4.573	.021

The regression results show that coaching has a positive and significant influence on employee performance ($B = 1.070, \beta = .753, t = 4.573, p = .021$). This indicates that a one-unit increase in coaching quality leads to a 1.07-point improvement in employee performance, holding other factors constant.

The resulting regression equation is expressed as:

$$Y = 2.057 + 1.070X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Employee Performance, X_1 = Coaching and ε = Error term

This positive coefficient signifies that employees who receive regular, structured coaching perform better than those who do not. The finding corroborates earlier research by Bweng'i (2015) and Bozer and Jones (2018), who emphasized that coaching enables goal alignment, improved task execution, and stronger interpersonal communication in public institutions. Consequently, county governments seeking to improve performance should institutionalize coaching as a continuous development strategy rather than a one-time intervention.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that coaching has a strong positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance in the County Government of Murang'a. The findings revealed that coaching enhances job satisfaction ($M = 4.54, SD = 0.23$), skills development ($M = 4.12, SD = 1.09$), team participation ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.32$), and goal achievement ($M = 3.78, SD = 0.63$). Correlation results showed a significant positive relationship between coaching and performance ($r = 0.753, p < 0.05$), while regression analysis indicated that coaching

explained 56.7% of the variation in employee performance ($R^2 = .567$, $F = 38.72$, $p < .001$). These findings align with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes that guided learning experiences build self-efficacy, thereby improving individual and organizational performance. The results also corroborate Bozer and Jones (2018), who found that structured coaching increases goal clarity and motivation among public sector employees.

Implications of the Study

The results reinforce Social Cognitive Theory by empirically demonstrating that observational learning and guided feedback foster self-belief and competence, leading to higher employee performance. This study extends the theory by showing that in public sector settings, structured coaching enhances not just individual efficacy but also collective performance through knowledge transfer and accountability mechanisms. Practitioners should integrate coaching into daily management routines rather than treating it as an isolated intervention. County departments should train supervisors as certified workplace coaches capable of offering regular feedback, setting developmental goals, and monitoring progress. Embedding coaching in performance appraisal systems will create a culture of continuous learning, motivation, and accountability.

The findings call for policy frameworks that institutionalize coaching across county governments. Policies should provide guidelines for coaching frequency, evaluation metrics, and supervisor training. Additionally, resource allocation for coaching initiatives should be standardized to ensure equitable access for all employees, thereby strengthening capacity-building and improving service delivery outcomes. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how sustained coaching relationships influence performance over time. Studies could also explore the interaction between coaching and other learning mechanisms such as mentoring and peer learning to determine synergistic effects. Further, comparative studies across counties or sectors would reveal contextual factors that enhance or constrain the effectiveness of coaching in public institutions.

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