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Influence of Trade Union Affiliation on Organizational Performance of Selected Kenya Tea Development Authority Managed Tea Factories, Kenya

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Abstract:

The study attempted to find out the influence of trade union affiliation on organizational performance in the tea processing industry in Kenya. This interest was motivated by a scarcity of literature on the relationship between trade union activities and their impact on employee productivity and, thus, organizational performance. The researcher used research hypotheses to guide him in achieving the objectives. A review of the existing literature revealed that trade unions engage in a wide range of activities on behalf of their members. The study used a Case Study design, with Kenya Tea Development Authority (KTDA) managed factories serving as the study's unit of analysis. The sampling frame for this research included the sixty-six (66) KTDA-managed factories in Kenya, and the population was clustered into seven (7), according to the region of the factories. Simple random sampling was used to obtain a 30% sample of each of the seven (7) clusters. A purposive sampling was then used to select the Human Resource and Administration Managers, and simple random sampling to select two (2) unionizable employees, totaling three (3) respondents from each of the selected factories. Structured questionnaires were used as the appropriate research instrument to collect data from respondents. The study established that trade union affiliation had a significant relationship with the performance of an organization. The findings also revealed that trade unions play an important role in their members' work lives. Trade union activities, such as collective bargaining, strike actions, and employee representation, empower workers and eventually make them confident and productive, increasing organizational performance. The study recommends that trade union activities and a positive working relationship with trade unions be encouraged because they are linked to improving organizational performance.

Keywords: Organization, performance, productivity, trade union

1. Introduction

Over the years, trade unionism has been viewed as one of the most common and popular features of an organization's workforce, as it seeks to protect the rights and interests of labor from arbitrary economic exploitation and abuse of labor dignity by management (Dev'atz, 2011). Thus, it is regarded as a fundamental tool and instrument used by employees of organizations to gain understanding and influence management decisions that may be detrimental or contrary to the contract of agreement. According to research, unionized organizations are more productive than non-unionized businesses (Griswold, 2010; Amah & Ahiauzu, 2013). They claim that this is because trade unions put upward pressure on salaries and wages. This puts upward pressure on labor costs, prompting organization managers to increase capital intensity and labor force quality, improving labor performance. However, trade unions do not always result in improved performance.

According to Deery and Iverson (2005), organizational performance suffers if trade unions oppose firms' adoption of modern technologies. They positively impact performance if they successfully negotiate better working conditions and remuneration packages for employees. These findings motivate organizational employees who belong to trade unions to work more efficiently, thereby improving the company's performance. Trade unions can have a negative impact on organizational performance by causing employees to stop working or engage in sabotage. This is done when trade unions rally their members to strike when peaceful negotiations fail. Strikes, slowdowns, and sabotage all reduce organizational performance. This means that to improve performance and avoid disruptions in workflow and business operations, employers must maintain good working relationships with their employees through trade unions (Deery & Iverson, 2005).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Kenya ranked among the world's biggest tea exporters, with hundreds of thousands of tea farmers earning a living from the commodity. However, the tea industry is screeching to a halt, with statistics from 2014 showing a decrease in production (TBK, 2016). Due to the challenges facing the tea industry, there has been growing sensitivity and concern over the dismal performance of the tea industry in Kenya. There is a strong conviction in the role trade union can play in enhancing the performance and repositioning the tea industry. Recently, tea firms incurred losses as tea-pickers went on a go slow, defying a court order to resume work after the KTGA moved to the Court of Appeal to quash a ruling by the Employment and Labour Relations Court that ruled that the employees should get salary increase by 30%, retirement age at 60, one rest day a week, medical allowance of Ksh.30,000.00 baggage allowance of Ksh.30,000.00 upon the termination of employment among other benefits (TBK, 2016).

KPAWU, on the other hand, insisted it was unable to intervene in the strike, claiming that while a Nairobi court had issued a court order directing them to return to work, the union was unable to do so because they had not called the go-slow in the first place (TBK, 2016). However, by acts of commission or omission, the trade unions have not done much to enhance organizational performance. Unions should ideally mobilize their members toward higher productivity. Sometimes unions generally ignore the productivity side of the equation in favor of workers' welfare and remuneration. Enormous research has been undertaken regarding issues on trade unions and organizational performance. However, little attention has been dedicated to assessing trade unions and the organizational performance of the tea industry in Kenya, and, in particular, the KTDA Ltd. managed tea factories. This study sought to establish the relationship between union affiliation and organizational performance, and to address this, the study sought to accept or reject the following formulated research hypothesis:

- H_01 : There is no significant relationship between union affiliation and organizational performance
- H_11 : There is a significant relationship between union affiliation and organizational performance

2. Trade Unions

A trade union is a group of workers who band together to protect the interests of their members through collective action. Employees' job unions primarily improve their working conditions; thus, unions have been formed at the organizational, national, and international levels. According to Mathis and Jackson (2008), the percentage of union membership varies significantly across countries.

According to historical data, a survey of 30 countries found that only four countries' union membership percentages have increased since 1970 (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden). Union membership is declared in many advanced countries. However, collective bargaining is mandated by law as the method by which wages are determined in Europe. In many European countries, artificially high wages and generous benefits have kept unemployment rates high, but pressures for change are increasing. The scope of labor concerns varies, and unions do not exist or are only weak in some countries, whereas other countries require firms to have a union or worker representation on their boards of directors (Bolton & Haulian, 2007; Clegg et al., 2005; Elli & Dick, 2000; Greenberg, 2002; McKenna & Beech, 2002). According to a survey conducted in the United Kingdom by WIRS, a global trend indicates a significant decline in union recognition. The overall figure fell from 66% in 1984 to 53% in 1990 (Gall & McKay, 2004). Only 3% of all workplaces that did not recognize unions by 1990 had previously recognized unions at some point in 1984. According to Torrington et al. (2005), industrial restructuring is the primary cause of trade unions declining in the United Kingdom. There has been a decline in established industries where unionization is the norm because jobs have been lost and replaced with service sectors where unionization is much rarer, such as call centers, retailing, and tourism. The average size of the workplace has also decreased, negatively impacting employees' proclivity to join a union. They claim that there are fewer factories employing thousands of workers on assembly lines than there were previously. Many people have weighed on whether continued trade union decline is unavoidable, and their opinions are mixed. From a trade union standpoint, and despite years of new initiatives aimed at recruiting new members in the private sector, there are reasons to be pessimistic.

According to Waddington (2003), in 1991, 37% of people in the UK aged between 25 and 34 were union members; ten years later, the union density among people under the age of 30 had fallen to 16%, compared to 34% among those aged 30 years and above. According to McKenna and Beech (2002), the tradition of employee representation through trade unions and collective bargaining as the focus of engagement between management and unions is facing replacement, not of a single type, by new workplace relationships. According to Aluchio (1998), trade unions in Kenya are organized on an industrial basis in accordance with a 1957 agreement between the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE) and the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU), formerly the Kenya Federation of Labour. In Kenya, union activities are restricted to workers below the supervisor rank, except personnel engaged in undertaking confidential, directive, and administrative representational and supervisory activities. Trade unions follow rules that must be in accordance with Kenya's Trade Unions Act (Cap 233). All unions must have aims and objectives, and state the areas the union will represent, the types of workers who will be members, a membership fee and a monthly contribution fee, honorary membership provisions, and other rules.

According to Mathis and Jackson (2008), unions and management have an adversarial relationship that sometimes results in strikes and lockouts. However, such conflicts are uncommon. Recognition by both parties is critical for the relationship between management and labor unions. Employees are most concerned about recognition in terms of respect, esteem, and approval from others, as a lack of which frequently leads to a loss of esteem and motivation. Armstrong (2006) describes the factors that influence recognition or de-recognition. These factors include:

- The perceived value or lack thereof of having collective bargaining,
- The extent to which management has the freedom to manage unions,

- The history of the relationship with the union,
- The number of union members and the proportion of employees who are members, and
- The preference for a specific union

Trade unions are seen to be in partnership with employers, albeit with an element of pragmatism, recognizing that the new unionisms appear to be moderate and conciliatory to maintain support from employers and the state. According to Beardwell and Claydon (2007), the concept of social partnership can be called in to question if it is not supportive of managers or employers. On the other hand, critics of the concept of social partnership question the viability of such relationships. According to Kely (1996), forming meaningful relationships with people who wish you did not exist is difficult.

According to Bacon and Storey (1996), a number of firms' partnership initiatives have failed due to a lack of management commitment to the process, resulting in nothing more than partnership rhetoric. According to Armstrong (2007), a partnership may not work if decisions are made unilaterally without consulting trade union officials and senior management does not truly believe in partnership. According to Mosley et al. (1996), leadership is the process of influencing group and individual activities toward goal setting and achievement. According to Beardwell and Claydon (2007), a number of bargaining initiatives emerged during the 1980s that altered the level and structure of collective bargaining. The initiatives have facilitated the exercise of managerial prerogative in the bargaining relationship while also narrowing the scope of bargaining channels to a greater extent. According to Mathis and Jackson (2006), unions in some countries are inextricably linked to political parties. National strikes are held on a regular basis in Italy and France to protest proposed changes in government policy on retirement, pensions, and employee dismissal regulations.

In an examination of labor unions and their effects on organizational performance, Cote (2013) contends that the primary reason workers join unions is the benefits of collective bargaining, which allows workers to achieve a monopolistic position. The monopolistic position allows workers to increase their compensation while also protecting their rights. Furthermore, worker unionization contributes significantly to improved company performance. Cote, on the other hand, does not explain how trade unions improve organizational performance. It would have been more useful for him to compare performance between unionized and non-unionized organizations. As a result, trade unions can improve organizational performance. However, trade unions have the potential to reduce a firm's performance. When trade unions fail to negotiate better terms peacefully, they frequently go on strike, during which firms' performance suffers (Cote, 2013).

In Kenya, very few empirical studies on labor relations and organizational performance have been conducted. Manda et al. (2005) investigated the relationships between trade union membership and earnings in Kenyan tea firms. The study found that trade unions in Kenya positively impact wages and can compel wage increases for their members. They also discovered that most Kenyan elite tea workers avoided trade unions. Hafford and Koops (2009) conducted a study on the impact of unionization on negotiated wages in Kenya, paying special attention to the legal framework for collective bargaining agreement negotiations. This study found that unionization had no discernible effect on wage differentials between firms. However, the researchers did not focus on the firm's performance in relation to trade unions.

Thompson (2011) conducted a study to determine the methods that Kenyan trade unions use to achieve their goals. His research focused on the making and construction of industries in the country between 2000 and 2010. He established that strikes are the most commonly used tool for articulating interests in Kenyan trade unions. He discovered that whenever union officials detect management's unwillingness to engage in negotiations, they mobilize members to boycott work. According to Thompson (2011), such labor strikes resulted in massive revenue losses for firms because performance during the strike period was at zero levels. Thompson notes that in some cases, strikes would be accompanied by severe victimization, such as the widespread dismissal of striking workers. This demonstrates the weakness of trade unions, as they could not secure a favorable return-to-work formula for their members. Based on the previous review of literature, it is clear that while many studies have been conducted on various aspects of trade unions in Kenya and even in foreign countries, a study specifically on the influence of trade unions on organizational performance in Kenya's tea industry is lacking in the literature. Similarly, no research on trade unions in the tea industry has been conducted to date. As a result, the study investigates the impact of trade unions on organizational performance in KTDA-managed tea factories.

2.1. Trade Unions Affiliation

Trade unions provide a variety of benefits to their registered members, which stem from the work that trade unions do. First, trade unions assist employees in negotiating and reaching agreements with their employers on appropriate pay and working conditions (Manda et al., 2005). Unlike individual employees, workers have a much easier time negotiating salary increases. Thus, by joining a trade union, an employee may be able to benefit from collective bargaining for better salaries and wages, among other benefits. Second, trade unions represent workers and protect them from potential employer exploitation. When employees have workplace concerns, trade unions take them up and discuss them with employers. These concerns include but are not limited to increased holidays and working hours. This means that if employees join trade unions, they will be able to discuss most, if not all, of their concerns without delay, fear, or intimidation.

Trade unions are also advantageous to organizations because they enable employers to negotiate productivity agreements with their employees (Cote, 2013). Output targets are agreed upon by employers and union leaders in such productivity deals, with unions promising to mobilize their members to achieve the set targets and employers promising to increase employee rewards. As a result, these types of agreements ensure mutual benefits for both workers and organizations, and at the end of the day, no party feels it has suffered a loss. Another important function of trade unions is

to provide their members with educational opportunities and a variety of consumer benefits, such as discounted insurance. Employees are allowed to acquire new skills, which make them work more productively for the benefit of the organization, thanks to these educational opportunities. It also ensures that they remain relevant to their organization by keeping up with the ever-changing technology. Furthermore, trade unions offer moral and legal counsel to members facing disciplinary action. Union representatives accompany workers to disciplinary hearings and even speak up for them. Members are offered free legal services and are even represented in court by trade unions in legal cases.

According to Beardwell and Claydon (2007), trade unions improve the economic and social conditions of all workers in a given country, as well as provide assistance to them whether or not such workers are employed or have ceased to be employed. Furthermore, they ensure adequate representation on government boards and committees dealing with labor regulation and worker issues. Trade unions are concerned about maintaining adequate representation on government boards and committees dealing with labor legislation and worker issues (Mosley et al., 1996). Trade unions act as an agency for commenting on economic, social, and political issues, including securing legislative protection for workers from the government by acting in accordance with existing laws and regulations, union rules, good industrial relations practice; and liaison with and seeking advice and assistance from the appropriate full-time trade union official (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007).

Collective bargaining trade unions negotiate wages and salaries, assisting in the distribution of value-added to the business firm and increasing the economic spending power of their members (Armstrong, 2007). While maximizing member benefits, trade unions are always mindful of the potential impact of their bargaining on inflation and employment. Globalization has resulted in the majority of countries having open economies that rely on trade for survival. In most cases, the cost of imported goods and services determines inflation. There is little evidence to suggest that trade unions are to blame for the region's cost-push inflationary tendencies (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007). Unions, on the other hand, focus their efforts on protecting their members from the aftereffects of inflation and attempting to raise living standards that have historically been low. Furthermore, they fight for their members' right to work and support macro and microeconomic policies that promote high employment (Cote, 2013).

3. Research Design

A research design is a method for achieving economic research objectives through empirical evidence. The design chosen is determined by the research purpose described by the research problems and questions, data categories required, data sources, and cost factors (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). It is the collection, analysis, and planning of data to find answers to research questions (Coopers & Sch'dler, 2006). The case study method was used in the research study. A case study design was most appropriate because it provided a focused and detailed insight into phenomena that could otherwise be unclear. The case study method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon of KTDA thoroughly. A case study entails meticulous observation and analysis of a unit in relation to any other unit of the group (Kothari, 2008).

The study's target population consisted of sixty (66) KTDA-managed factories in Kenya (KTDA, 2016). As a result, the study's unit of analysis was KTDA-managed factories. This study's sampling frame included sixty-six (66) KTDA limited managed factories. The population was divided into seven (7) groups based on the locations of the factories within which 30% of the population was sampled through simple random sampling of factories within clusters, with each factory in the cluster having an equal chance of being chosen for this study. A purposive sampling was then used to select the Human Resource and Administration Managers, and simple random sampling to select two (2) unionizable employees, totaling three (3) respondents from each of the selected factories.

The data collection instrument used was a questionnaire, and the questions were directed at the respondents to satisfy the study's purpose and provide analysis. The questions focused on the study's objectives, research hypothesis, and personal concerns. Closed-ended questions were used because they provide more uniform responses and are easier to process. The questionnaires were self-administered by the researcher and filled out by the respondents.

To improve validity, experts were consulted, and the suggestions and advice they provided were used to modify the instrument. Reliability of the collected data was attained by having the questionnaires tested and retested by the same group of respondents twice in two weeks under the same conditions. The results of both testing periods were compared. The questionnaire's contents were reviewed and analyzed to ensure that the instrument was appropriate for the purpose for which it was designed.

4. Findings on Union Affiliation

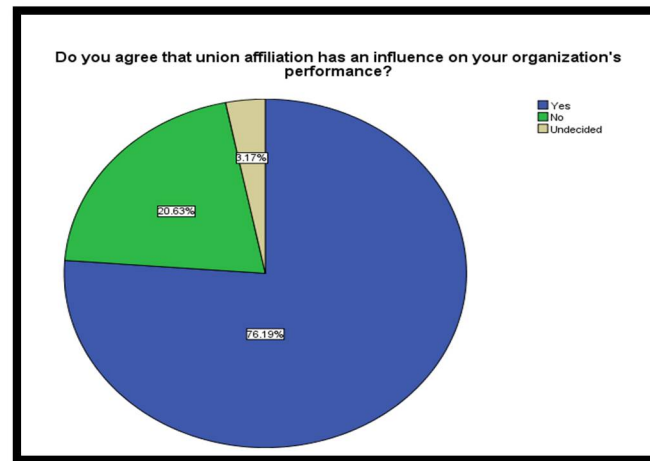


Figure 1: Trade Union Affiliation and Organizations Performance
Source: Researcher (2017)

When the respondents were asked whether affiliation to trade unions has an influence on their organization's performance, 76.19% of the respondents indicated that it has an influence, 20.63% responded that it has no influence, while 3.17% were undecided. Figure 1 shows the pie chart representation of the responses. The respondents were also requested to rank in order of extent level of agreement on the benefits of being affiliated with a trade union in an organization. The results are summarized in table 1.

	N	M	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
The trade unions negotiate wages and working conditions in terms of their members	63	4	5	4.90	.296
Trade unions cushion their members against harsh inflationary periods.	63	3	5	3.95	.455
Trade unions establish and determine job standards for the organization for their members	63	4	5	4.17	.383
Trade unions regulate relations between workers (their members) and the employer	63	3	5	4.08	.373
Trade unions represent workers at disciplinary and grievance hearings.	63	3	5	4.35	.600

Table 1: Benefits of Union Affiliation
Source: Researcher (2017)

From the findings of table 1, most respondents agreed that the trade unions negotiate wages and working conditions in terms of their members, with a mean of 4.90. This was followed by the statement that trade unions, on average, represent workers at disciplinary and grievance hearings. The establishment and determination of job standards of the organization for its members came third, with a mean of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.383. This implies that by joining a union, employees gain better working conditions, increasing their productivity and, as a result, having a greater influence on the tea factories' performance.

The findings show that, as Cote (2013) established, trade unions represent workers during disciplinary or other grievance hearings. This is done to ensure that the affected unionized workers receive not only moral support but also fair decisions.

The findings revealed that employees who are members of trade unions benefit from various activities of trade unions hence their productivity. These include negotiating wages and terms of working conditions for its members, cushioning its members against harsh inflationary periods, establishing and determining job standards for the organization for its members, regulating relations between workers (its members) and the employer, and representing workers at disciplinary and grievance hearings. According to the findings, respondents agreed that trade unions negotiate wages and working conditions for their members. However, as Cote (2013) argues, these activities may pose challenges to trade unions because trade unions drive up wages, and if wages rise above the equilibrium, they 'advertently cause unemployment.

4.2. Testing of Hypotheses

Testing of the hypothesis was performed using Chi-Square (X^2) at a 5% significance level using the chi-square formula:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

Where:

- X^2 = Chi-Square distribution,
- F_o = Observed frequency,
- F_e = Expected frequency

4.2.1. Decision Rule

The hypothesis test will be performed at a 5% level of significance, with the decision rule being that if the calculated value is less than the critical value, we accept the null hypothesis (H_0) and reject the alternate hypothesis (H_1). However, if the calculated value is greater than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternate hypothesis (H_1).

4.2.1.1. Hypothesis I

- H_01 : There is no significant relationship between union affiliation and organizational performance;
- H_{11} : There is a significant relationship between union affiliation and organizational performance;

In testing the hypothesis, responses to the question 'Do you agree that union affiliation has an influence on your organization's performance?' were used.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Yes	55	21.0	34.0
No	6	21.0	-15.0
Undecided	2	21.0	-19.0
Total	63		

Table 2: Observed and Expected Frequencies for Hypothesis I
Source: Researcher (2017)

	Do you agree that union affiliation has an influence on your organization's performance?
Chi-Square	82.952 ^a
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 3: Computation of X^2 and Degree of Freedom (DF) for Hypothesis I
Source: Researcher (2017)

From table 3, 2 degrees of freedom at 0.05 is 5.991. Therefore, X^2 critical value = 5.991, and X^2 calculated value = 82.952

- **Decision:** Since the calculated value of 82.952 is greater than the critical value of 5.991, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant relationship between union affiliation and organizational performance, should be rejected, while the alternate hypothesis (H_1), which states that there is a significant relationship between union affiliation and organizational performance, is accepted.

This finding is consistent with Pencavels' (2009) argument that trade unions typically have political clout and that union leaders can lobby policymakers, and that of Mosley et al. (1996), who argue that trade unions strive to be adequately represented on government boards in order to protect employee interests. In terms of organizational performance, the study found that when trade unions mobilize their members for collective action when negotiations fail, organizational performance suffers. Instead, the findings show that strikes, which are the primary means by which trade unions express themselves, are associated with a decrease in organizational performance. This is consistent with Deery and Iverson's (2005) claim that trade unions have a negative impact on organizational performance by going on strike when negotiations fail. Mar'dany (2012), who contends that labor union strikes reduce organizational performance, agrees. This is difficult to achieve due to a lack of sufficient information and expertise required by trade unions to negotiate for equilibrium wages that ensure high wages are paid to employees without causing unemployment.

The study recommends that businesses should try to encourage the growth of trade unions because they are associated with improved organizational performance.

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