

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE IN ALEBTONG DISTRICT, UGANDA. A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY.

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Abstract.

Background.

Performance appraisal is the strength of performance management, which in turn affects employee performance and further helps to identify and overcome the problems faced by the employees in his/her work. This study aimed to assess the relationship between performance standards and employees' performance in Alebtong District.

Methodology.

A cross-sectional research design that exploited a quantitative approach was adopted. The sample size was 141 participants, the study population included principal officers, senior officers, officers, and senior assistants, assistant officers, and subordinate staff respectively.

Results.

The majority of the participants were male (56.74%), (41.13%) were aged between (31-40) years. Performance Standard has a positive but weaker correlation with Employee Performance (0.352), The linear regression analysis indicates that Performance Standards have no significant effect on employee performance (coefficient=0.097, $p > 0.05$). On average, the respondents tended to agree with the statements related to performance standards, with a mean score of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 1.15.

Conclusion.

There is a weak relationship between Performance Standards and employee performance in this analysis.

Recommendation.

There is a need to review and potentially update the standards to better align with organizational goals and explore alternative assessment approaches for more insightful performance evaluation.

Keywords: Performance Standards, Employee Performance, Alebtong District, Uganda, Work Standards.

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Background.

Performance appraisal serves as the cornerstone of performance management, influencing employee performance while helping to identify and address workplace challenges (Akinbowale & Lourens, 2014). Despite its numerous advantages for organizations, performance appraisal can also adversely affect both organizational outcomes and employee performance (Khan & Rehmat, 2020). Kihama and Wainaina (2019) assert that managers are capable of making accurate judgments about employee performance. However, Akinbowale and Jinabhai (2014) note that rating inaccuracies often result from intentional distortion driven by a rater's agenda rather than unconscious errors or biases.

London and Sessa (2022) observe that performance ratings tend to cluster around moderate or high levels, with negative feedback being less frequently communicated than positive

feedback. This tendency to rate employees as average or above average stems from the discomfort associated with conveying below-average ratings. Similarly, Recter and Byron (2010, as cited in Akinbowale & Lourens, 2014) highlight a common preference for marking in the middle or higher on rating scales, as raters often avoid delivering negative evaluations due to empathetic buffering. Adler and Colquitt (2016) provide evidence suggesting that managers sometimes use performance ratings to achieve objectives unrelated to accurate evaluation. Fear of conflict with underperforming employees may prompt inflated ratings, which managers might also use to boost employee self-efficacy (Kong & Peng, 2023). Additionally, inflated ratings may be employed to protect a manager's reputation, as poorly performing employees could reflect negatively on their supervisors (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016).

Performance appraisals can have both positive and negative impacts. Employees who receive favorable evaluations often feel motivated to sustain or enhance their performance, with positive feedback fostering a sense of value, especially when accompanied by salary increments (Akinbowale & Lourens, 2014). Conversely, poor appraisal scores can diminish motivation and adversely affect employee performance (Ochidi & Olusegun, 2019). Zeker and Olusegun (2019) emphasize that performance appraisals benefit employees by clarifying strategic objectives and their roles in achieving organizational success. This understanding helps employees align their contributions with the organization's goals. Furthermore, appraisals enable employees to recognize their potential and leverage it for personal and organizational advantage (Okeny, 2018), fostering fulfillment and continuous improvement (Jordan, 2013).

In the Ugandan civil service, performance management is structured at both national and individual levels. At the national level, it involves baseline data collection, performance plans, assessments, and reports (MAAIF, 2021). Parliament and district councils assess performance through committees and local evaluations, respectively. At the individual level, performance appraisal includes agreements on key outputs and regular monitoring between supervisors and subordinates (Lalwani, 2020). Permanent secretaries oversee ministry performance, while directors and heads of departments appraise their subordinates (Mitala, 2013). Uganda implemented a revised performance appraisal system in the 2001/2002 financial year (PAII) following recommendations from the Public Service Review and Reorganization Commission (PSRRC). This reform sought to improve public sector productivity and

service delivery by shifting from the subjective, closed PAI system to a results-based approach that linked performance to specific targets (Mpanga, 2019; Ntirandekura & Munyaneza, 2022). The earlier system lacked transparency, excluded feedback for appraised individuals, and was prone to favoritism and corruption (Karyeija, 2012). Inspired by global best practices and supported by World Bank initiatives, the reformed appraisal system emphasized accountability and measurable outcomes (Wenene & Oeganda, 2016; Denkyira, 2014). This shift reflected broader civil service reforms aligning with New Public Management principles. This study aimed to assess the relationship between performance standards and employees' performance in Alebtong District.

Methodology. **Study Design.**

A cross-sectional and correlational research design that exploited a quantitative approach was adopted. Cross-sectional because it allowed data collection to be done at a specific time interval (Wang & Cheng, 2020). This design made it simple and easy to find out the current performance appraisal practices and how they influence employee performance in the Alebtong district

Sample size determination.

The sample size was chosen based on the sample size determination table by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). According to Krejcie and Morgan, (1970), each subgroup is to be treated as a population, and then use the table to determine the recommended sample size for each subgroup.

Table 1: Sample Size Determination.

Categories	Target population	Sample size	Sampling techniques
CAO, DCAO, PCAO & ACAO	4	4	Purposive
HODs/Sectoral heads	6	6	Purposive
Sub county staffs	200	131	Simple random sampling
Total	210	141	

Source: Alebtong District Human Resource Department, 2023

Study Population

The study participant was the confirmed employee's payroll that was picked from the Alebtong District local government. The data was obtained from the offices or departments of human resources from Alebtong District Local Government and the study population was 210 employees. They included principal officers, senior officers, officers, senior assistants, assistant officers, and subordinate staff respectively drawn from various Departments like Administration, Finance. Education and natural resources

Sampling Procedures

This study adopted two sampling techniques, namely, purposive and simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is a type of probability sampling in which the researcher randomly selects a subset of participants from a population. Each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Simple random sampling using the lottery method will be used to select sub-county staff because it ensures that all members have an equal level of participation without any bias. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and

selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Furthermore, purposive sampling was employed to select CAO, DCAO, PCAO, ACAO, and HODs/Sectoral heads due to their in-depth understanding of the study topic. Here these categories of respondents are believed to have rich information regarding performance appraisal and how this is related to staff performance.

Data Collection Methods **Questionnaire Survey**

A questionnaire survey method was used. The questionnaire was used for collecting data from the employees because it saves time, they are cheap, encourages confidentiality, and allowed the collection of data from a large sample size according to Wang & Cheng (2020). Questionnaires allowed respondents to fill them out at their convenience time.

Interview

Interviews were used only with the CAO, DCAO, PCAO, ACAO, and HODs/Sectoral heads. This will enable the extraction of information that Sub-county staff cannot talk about openly, regarding appraisal practices and staff performance. The key informant interviews were conducted using the interview guide which was designed by the main themes of the study. The response of the key informants to the questions in the interview guide was audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Collection Instruments. **Questionnaires**

Data was collected using a Self-Administered Questionnaire (SAQ) developed by the researcher. Questionnaires were separated into three sub-sections; where section A captured information about the demographic characteristics of the respondents, section B captured the performance appraisal and Section C captured information on staff performance.

Interview Guide

The interview guide consisted of structured and leading questions that helped the interviewer prompt the interviewee to expound and elaborate more on the subject for purposes of clarity. The key informant interviews included CAO, DCAO, PCAO, ACAO, and HODs/Sectoral heads. The main themes in the interview guide included performance appraisal and staff performance.

Data Quality Control **Validity**

The validity of the instrument was determined using the Content Validity Index (CVI). Content validity was used to establish the extent to which the instruments can measure the phenomenon under investigation (Roberta & Alison, 2016). Three experts were requested to rate the tool on relevance, simplicity, clarity, and ambiguity. Each expert rated the questions on a two-point scale of Relevance (R) and Irrelevance (IR). Precisely, content validity was established by calculating the content validity index (CVI) using the formula stated: As a rule of thumb, CVI at 0.70 and above is acceptable. In this case, the CVI was 0.75 which was considered.

Table 2: Content Validity Index (CVI)

Variable(s)	Number of items	CVI (%)
Performance Standard	6	100
Performance Measurement	5	100
Result Dissemination	4	100
Employee performance	5	100
Overall questionnaire	20	100

Source: Primary Data (2023)

Reliability

The term reliability refers to the extent to which a measurable quantity yielded consistent results (Wijesiri, et al., 2019). To ensure the Reliability of the questionnaire, it was piloted and tested using a test by administering it to representatives of 15 respondents to establish the degree of the relationship in terms of correlation of scores of the items. Correlations between the scores of the items were estimated using Cronbach alpha value. The reliability testing formula is defined as;

= the variance of the observed total test scores, =the variance of component for the current sample of persons. The reliability coefficient that was obtained indicated the internal consistency of the responses. A commonly accepted rule of thumb for describing internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha is as follows, however, a greater number of items in the test can artificially inflate the value of alpha and so this rule of thumb should be used with caution (Cho, 2016). Therefore, Cronbach Alpha was tested for the constructs.

Data analysis

Quantitative data

Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23) for analysis. Pearson linear correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between performance appraisal and staff performance. Linear regression was further used to determine the predictors of staff performance.

Ethical approval

Consent was sought from the respondents, participation was at will, identity was not revealed to anyone as only code was used, there was an adequate level of confidentiality as Information obtained was only accessible by the researcher and team only, data was securely stored, ethically used, and disposed safely and participants were assured of privacy.

Ethical approval

A letter of introduction was obtained from Team University and addressed to the CAO of Alebtong district; requesting permission to conduct the study.

Informed consent.

Consent was obtained from each participant and respondents were assured of utmost confidentiality. The respondents were assured of anonymity and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. No names were written on the questionnaire. The questionnaires were kept separate from consent forms to avoid association of the two.

Results.

Background Characteristics

Table 3: Background Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	80	56.74
Female	61	43.26
Age category		
<=30	25	17.73
31-40	58	41.13
41-50	43	30.5
above 50	15	10.64
Education		
Primary	3	2.13
Secondary	17	12.06
Certificate/Diploma	63	44.68
Bachelor degree	47	33.33
Master and above	11	7.8
Department		
Natural resource	17	12.06
Finance and planning	40	28.37
Education and health	29	20.57
Administration	49	34.75
Others	6	4.26
Years of experience		
Less than 5years	49	34.75
5-10years	57	40.43
More than 10 years	35	24.82

Table 3: shows that the majority were male (56.74%), while females made up 43.26% of the sample. Regarding age, the largest proportion falls within the 31-40 age category (41.13%), followed by 41-50 (30.5%), <=30 (17.73%), and above 50 (10.64%). In terms of education, the majority of respondents held Certificate/Diploma qualifications (44.68%), followed by Bachelor's degrees (33.33%), Secondary education (12.06%), Master's and above (7.8%), and Primary education (2.13%). In terms of department, Administration was the most common (34.75%), followed

by Finance and Planning (28.37%), Education and Health (20.57%), Natural Resources (12.06%), and Other departments (4.26%). Lastly, when considering years of experience, a significant portion had 5-10 years of experience (40.43%), followed by less than 5 years (34.75%) and More than 10 years (24.82%).

Descriptive statistics for Performance standards (n=141)

KEY: SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neutral, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for Performance standards. Table 3: shows that the majority were male (56.74%), while females made up 43.26% of the sample. Regarding age, the largest proportion falls within the 31-40 age category (41.13%), followed by 41-50 (30.5%), <=30 (17.73%), and above 50 (10.64%). In terms of education, the majority of respondents held Certificate/Diploma qualifications (44.68%), followed by Bachelor's degrees (33.33%), Secondary education (12.06%), Master's and above (7.8%),

and Primary education (2.13%). In terms of department, Administration was the most common (34.75%), followed by Finance and Planning (28.37%), Education and Health (20.57%), Natural Resources (12.06%), and Other departments (4.26%). Lastly, when considering years of experience, a significant portion had 5-10 years of experience (40.43%), followed by less than 5 years (34.75%) and More than 10 years (24.82%).

Descriptive statistics for Performance standards (n=141)

KEY: SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neutral, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for Performance standards.

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	St. Dev
Performance goals are made clear to all employees	47 (33.3)	50 (35.5)	23 (16.3)	13 (9.2)	8 (5.7)	3.82	1.16
The rating format used is not an effective measure of employee performance	27 (19.2)	49 (34.7)	42 (29.8)	15 (10.6)	8 (5.7)	3.51	1.09
Less time is spent on the appraisal process. It is treated as a mere ritual by supervisors and subordinates	44 (31.2)	49 (34.8)	26 (18.4)	12 (8.5)	10 (7.1)	3.74	1.19
The appraisal is participatory upon agreed indicators	58 (41.1)	45 (31.9)	23 (16.3)	11 (7.8)	4 (2.8)	4.01	1.07
Nonperformance is sanctioned in the organization	41 (29.0)	39 (27.7)	35 (24.8)	20 (14.2)	6 (4.3)	3.63	1.17
Outstanding performance is always recognized	32 (22.7)	48 (34.0)	30 (21.3)	19 (13.5)	12 (8.5)	3.49	1.22
Average	-	-	-	-	-	3.70	1.15

Table 4: shows that the majority of respondents either strongly agree or agree that performance goals are made clear to all employees (68.8% combined), and a significant portion feel that the rating format used is effective for measuring employee performance (54.0% combined). Furthermore, a substantial proportion agree that less time is spent on the appraisal process that it is seen as a ritual (65.0% combined), and that the appraisal process is participatory with agreed-upon indicators (72.9% combined). In terms of non-performance sanctions in the organization, a significant portion agree or strongly agree (56.7% combined), but recognition of outstanding performance receives mixed responses, with fewer strongly

agreeing (22.7%) compared to those who agree (34.0%). On average, the respondents tended to agree with the statements related to performance standards, with a mean score of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 1.15. These findings suggest that, overall, employees in the organization have a positive perception of performance goal clarity and the appraisal process, although recognition of outstanding performance could be improved.

Descriptive statistics of employees' performance in Alebtong district

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of employees' performance in Alebtong district

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	St. Dev
I normally report for work regular and timely	67 (48.2)	30 (21.6)	25 (18.0)	16 (11.5)	1 (0.7)	4.05	1.09
My office is open to the public and welcomes any one and views	48 (34.5)	57 (41.0)	16 (11.5)	11 (8.0)	7 (5.0)	3.92	1.11

We work as a team and put all resources into effective use	41 (29.5)	54 (38.9)	31 (22.3)	8 (5.8)	5 (3.6)	3.85	1.03
I rarely have to repeat a task because it was not done properly	29 (20.9)	44 (31.6)	31 (22.3)	28 (20.1)	7 (5.0)	3.43	1.17
The public has never raised a complaint about the quality of my service	42 (30.4)	40 (29.0)	33 (23.9)	12 (8.7)	11 (8.0)	3.65	1.22
Average	-	-	-		-	3.78	1.13

Table 5: shows that, on average, employees in the district exhibit a moderately positive performance level, with a mean score of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 1.13. The majority of employees report for work regularly and timely, with 48.2% strongly agreeing, indicating a strong commitment to punctuality. Furthermore, a significant proportion of employees have an open-door policy, welcoming anyone and their views into their offices (34.5% strongly agree). Additionally, teamwork and resource utilization are positively reflected, with 29.5% strongly agreeing that resources are effectively used within the team. However, there is room for improvement in task quality, as only 20.9% strongly agree that tasks are rarely repeated due

to improper completion. Similarly, while a substantial number of employees have not received public complaints about their service quality (30.4% strongly agree), there is room for enhancing this aspect. Overall, these statistics provide an overview of employee performance in the Alebtong district, highlighting strengths in punctuality, openness, and teamwork, as well as areas for potential improvement in task quality and service satisfaction.

The relationship between Performance standards and employee performance.

Table 6: Variable Correlations

Variables	(1)	(2)
(1) Employee performance	1.000	
(2) Performance standard	0.352*	1.000

* $p < 0.1$ (significant at 5%).

Table 6: indicates that Performance Standard has a positive but weaker correlation with Employee Performance (0.352). These positive correlations suggest that there is some degree of alignment between these variables and employee performance, although the relationships are not extremely strong. It's important to note that correlation does not imply

causation, and other factors may also influence employee performance.

Linear regression for predicting employee performance

Table 7: Linear regression for predicting employee performance

Employee performance	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% CI]
Performance Standards	0.097	0.088	1.11	0.271	-0.077-0.272
Constant	0.880	0.406	2.17	0.032**	0.077-1.683

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Table 7: indicates that Performance Standards have a coefficient of 0.097, but it is not statistically significant ($p > 0.1$). This implies that there may not be a strong relationship between Performance Standards and employee performance in this particular analysis. Additionally, the constant term has a coefficient of 0.880, indicating that even when the independent variables are zero, there is a baseline level of employee performance. This constant term is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that it has an impact on employee performance.

Discussion of results.

The relationship between performance standards and employees' performance in the Alebtong district

In discussing the findings related to the relationship between performance standards and employees' performance in the Alebtong district, there are various points of agreement and disagreement based on the provided information. There is a consensus on the significance of performance appraisal in managing employee performance. Researchers agree that performance appraisal is crucial for identifying challenges and motivating employees (Akinbowale & Lourens, 2014).

Positive feedback and recognition are acknowledged as motivational tools that can enhance employee performance and self-worth (Akinbowale & Lourens, 2014).

Performance appraisals are seen as opportunities for employees to understand organizational goals and their roles in achieving these goals (Zeker & Olusegun, 2019). There is a divergence of opinion regarding the accuracy of performance ratings. While some studies suggest that managers can form accurate judgments of employee performance (Kihama & Wainaina, 2019), others argue that there might be a tendency to inflate ratings due to reluctance to provide negative feedback (London & Sessa, 2022; Recter & Byron, 2010).

Disagreements exist concerning the factors influencing performance ratings. Some argue that ratings might be influenced by goals unrelated to accurate assessments, such as avoiding conflicts or boosting self-efficacy (Adler & Colquitt, 2016; Kong & Peng, 2023), while others emphasize the role of ratings in enhancing employees' understanding of their potential (Okeny, 2018).

There is a divergence in opinions regarding the impact of receiving a poor performance score. Some studies suggest that it can lead to decreased motivation and performance (Ochidi & Olusegun, 2019), while others emphasize the potential for recognizing areas of improvement and development (Okeny, 2018).

The reform in Uganda's performance appraisal system reflects a broader disagreement between the need for a more objective and results-oriented approach (Ntirandekura & Munyaneza, 2022) and concerns about the closed and confidential nature of the previous system (Wenene & Oeganda, 2016). Top of Form

Conclusion.

The study concluded that there is a weak relationship between Performance Standards and employee performance in this analysis.

Recommendation.

To address the weak link between Performance Standards and employee performance, it's recommended to review and potentially update the standards to better align with organizational goals and explore alternative assessment approaches for more insightful performance evaluation.

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List of abbreviations.

CAO:	Chief Administrative Officer.
DCAO:	District Chief Administrative Officer
PCAO:	Parish Chief Administrative Officer
ACAO:	Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
SPSS:	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
WHO:	World Health Organization
HOD:	Head of Department.
UN:	United Nations

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Conflict of interest.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Availability of data.

Data used in this study is available upon request from the corresponding author.

Authors contribution.

CCA designed the study, conducted data collection, cleaned and analyzed data, and drafted the manuscript and MS supervised all stages of the study from conceptualization of the topic to manuscript writing and submission.

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Collins Constant Alunga is a student of Master in Public Administration degree at the School of Research and Graduate Studies, Team University.

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