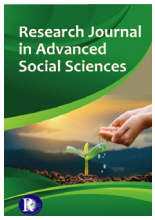

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Research Article

Section: Strategic Management

Effect of Interactive Communication and System Management Training Continuity on performance of tea firms in Nandi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Training on ISO 22000:2018(E) and organizational performance are closely linked. Yet, smallholder tea farmers in Nandi County still face challenges regarding quality. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of continuous training of ISO 22000:2018(E) certification on performance. This paper examines two variables from the stud, namely interactive communication training continuity and system management training continuity, and how they impact organizational performance. The study used cross-sectional study design and targeted 2988 employees out of which 353 were sampled through proportionate random sampling technique. Primary data and questionnaires were used. Validity was ensured through expert judgement. Reliability test through Cronbach's test yielded a coefficient of more than 0.7. Data was analysed using stepwise multiple linear regression. The study discovered that continuous training of ISO 22000-2018(E) explained 99.9% (R^2=0.999) variation of performance. Specifically, interactive communication training had an insignificant effect on performance (β =-.034, p=0.842). The study concluded that system management training continuity and system management training continuity have some roles to play in organizational performance of tea firms. It was thus recommended that the tea firms should ensure that interactive communication training continuity is enhanced to improve the organizational performance. Further, tea firms should also ensure that system management training continuity is enhanced within the tea firms and across the value chain.

Keywords: Interactive Communication Training Continuity, performance, tea firms

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1.0 Introduction

That the quality of food is predicated on its safety is not entirely untrue, so much so that International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has been brought to bear and in particular ISO 22000: 2018(E). According to Chen *et al.* (2020a), the fundamental postulate of ISO 22000: 2018(E) is to ensure food safety management (FSM) as well as food safety level, which are all continuous quality improvement measures aimed at food safety regardless of level of food handling in the value chain, complexity or size of the organization involved. Araújo *et al.* (2019) postulate that quality is a continuous process and not an end in itself. Therefore, the merits of continuous training, especially on ISO certification, cannot be underestimated. Continuous quality training ensures that organizations handling food items such as tea firms align themselves with the latest requirements to ensure that the products are globally accepted, are safe and healthy for consummation in the wider market (Araújo *et al.*, 2019).

Organizational performance, as a construct, is intrinsically multi-faceted (Chen *et al.*, 2022). Academic literature delineates various metrics, broadly classified into financial and non-financial measures, for gauging organizational performance. Financial measures typically encompass profit margins, return on investment (ROI), and growth rates. In contrast, non-financial measures might encompass customer satisfaction, innovation, quality of goods or services, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Globally, organizations have often utilized Balanced Scorecard (BSC) or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) approaches to gauge performance (Chen *et al.*, 2022). The BSC approach considers financial, customer, internal process and learning and growth perspectives as indicators of firm performance. KPIs are customized to diverse organizational contexts and strategies and can be diverse.

In Africa, discourse around quality improvement have been canvassed in literature and practice. Ahmed, Saeed and Hussien (2018) aver that the significance of continuous training in ISO 22000:2018(E) becomes even more salient due to unique challenges such as diverse food safety standards, infrastructural limitations, and limited technical know-how. The training empowers organizations to transcend these challenges, harmonizing food safety standards across the continent, bolstering risk management capacities, and enhancing intra-African and global trade prospects. In the local context, however, the successful implementation of continuous training necessitates overcoming challenges such as resource constraints, lack of technical expertise, and gaps in awareness about the importance of food safety (Bunei, Barclay & Kotey, 2021). According to Ahmed *et al.* (2018), food related deaths account for 137,000 deaths in Africa and more than 90 million illness annually which is why prerequisites in food safety becomes imperative within the framework of continuous training in Africa.

In Kenya, as Bunei *et al.* (2021) point out, over 70% of diarrheal cases are a result of food and water contamination. As a major tea exporter, continuous training on Critical Control Point (CCP) becomes necessary, not just as a step at which control measures can be brought to bear to significantly reduce or eliminate hazards related to food safety, but also as a way of quality improvement (Bunei *et al.*, 2021). According to Wang *et al.* (2018), safety challenges in tea manifest through pesticide residues or contamination in terms of chemical, physical or biological contamination all of which have a potential to impact health negatively and undermine brand positioning. According to a study conducted in Kenya by Bunei *et al.* (2021), the overarching objective was to investigate food safety and non-compliance in the tea industry.

According to Bunei *et al.* (2021), Nandi County in Kenya is populated mostly by small holder tea firms that hardly observe strict compliance with ISO 22000:2018(E), especially because of low levels of detection. In a study, Ndung'u *et al.* (2020) found that the tea industry in Nandi County has improved socio-economic prospects of the residents. Farmers sell their produce to tea manufacturers for local consumption and for export. Tea also contributes to food security and poverty eradication. It is thus a source of livelihood for many households. Further, tea has a cultural significance in Nandi County in particular and the country at large since it is the most preferred beverage shared with visitors at any time of the day (Ndung'u *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, in Nandi County, the training in ISO 22000:2018(E) has

crucial implications for the robust tea industry (Kipkemei, 2019). The training enables tea firms to meet international food safety standards, which is critical in maintaining their competitive edge in the global market. Further, such training underpins the creation of a culture of food safety, transparency, and quality assurance within these firms, augmenting their market reputation and customer trust. For this reason, continuous training of ISO 22000:2018(E) certification in terms of interactive communication training continuity and system management training continuity is a prerequisite for the organizational performance of tea firms.

1.1 Interactive communication training continuity and organizational performance

Kohli (1985) conducted a study whose aim was to investigate how communication training leads to role clarification in a marketing environment. The study was conducted among the marketing professionals and relied on qualitative data. The findings showed that interactive communication training improved the role of sales people. The study was nonetheless limited by the use of qualitative approach alone. The challenge with qualitative approach is that researchers are yet to agree on inclusive and exclusive criteria, something that undermines generalization.

A study conducted by Wang (2021) looked at interactive communication within organization and its link to performance. The study collected primary data from 82 respondents through questionnaires. The data so collected was analysed using thematic content analysis. The study was thus qualitative in orientation. The study findings revealed that interactive communication training contributes to timely response within the organizations sampled, which led to organizational performance. Although the study is instructive to the present work, it used thematic content analysis yet such analysis method suffers from researcher bias and hence undermine generalization.

Giudici and Filimonau (2019) also examined the link between communication and managerial performance within an office environment. The study was conducted in the United Kingdom and data was collected through in-depth interviews. The study was thus qualitative in nature and the study data was analysed using qualitative means. The results revealed that interactive communication training contributed to function linkage among managers within an organization. Even though the reviewed study is insightful, it was conducted in a developed country (UK) while the present study was undertaken in a developing country (Kenya).

Another empirical study conducted by Kamble *et al.* (2021) utilized secondary data to determine how interactive communication influenced value chain integration in block chain technology. The study data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study finding established that interactive communication training alone did not contribute to value chain integration. Although the study is informative to the present work, it used secondary data. The problem with secondary data is that specific questions about research may go unanswered and hence undermine credibility of findings.

Purwanto, Asbari and Santoso (2019) undertook a study to determine leadership communication and ISO certification with reference to food safety. The study employed simple random sampling to select 220 respondents. The study data was collected using questionnaires and analysed using inferential statistics. It was established that interactive communication enhanced food chain integration and hence contributed to ISO certification within the organizations sampled. Although the reviewed work was insightful, it used a small sample size that make wider generalization difficult.

1.2 System management training continuity and organizational performance

In a study, Chen *et al.* (2020a) studied food safety and hazard analysis examination. The study employed metanalysis technique and thus collected several secondary data previously published in various journals. The study data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study findings revealed that training on hazard identification contributed to ISO certification. However, Chen *et al.* used descriptive statistics alone, which exposed their study to researcher bias and limited implication in terms of scope

of application.

Another study conducted by Purwanto, Asbari and Santoso (2020) sought to determine the interplay of total quality systems training and performance. The study was conducted in Indonesia and sampled 144 respondents from 12 companies in the packaging sector. Primary data for the study was collected using questionnaires and analysed using inferential statistics. The study established that reduced hazard as a result of management system contributed to organizational performance. Although the study is informative to the present, it focused on total quality systems and thereby left out system management training continuity.

In a different empirical study, Chen *et al.* (2020b) sought to establish food safety procedures training and performance of food organizations dealing in powdered food. The study was quantitative in orientation. It utilized experimentation design to establish the availability of metals in powdered food. The study data was analysed using inferential statistics. The research results revealed that management systems prevent hazard from powdered food. Nevertheless, the reviewed study relied on experimental statistics. The problem with experimental statistics is that its artificial nature compromises the reliability of generalization because of the artificial environment.

Another study conducted by Chen *et al.* (2021) assessed the influence of implementation of food safety system training on performance of drug manufacturing company. The study was quantitative in nature. Questionnaires were used to collect data, which was then analysed using quantitative methods. The study results showed that system implementation had a significant positive correlation with quality performance within the organizations sampled. Although the study was instructive to the present work, it only focused on drug company. As such, it was necessary to carry out a similar study in the tea industry to establish the effect of training continuity on system management on performance of firms.

Chen *et al.* (2020c) further studied the role of risk analysis training in performance of small and medium enterprises in Taiwan. The study utilized experimentation and observation methods in data collection. Quantitative data was analysed using inferential statistics while qualitative data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The study revealed that continuous improvement led to performance of small and medium enterprises sampled. Although the study related to the present, it was conducted in a high-income economy, a context that is different from a developing country like Kenya where the present study was undertaken.

1.3 Problem Statement

Although tea is a major cash crop in Kenya, the challenges that bedevil smallholder farmers and employees of tea firms, especially in terms of safety procedures, are far from over. Safety regulation breaches among smallholder tea farmers and employees of tea firms manifest as a result of low-risk detection as well as lack of opportunities for continuous training for farmers, employees, consumers and even traders. As such, pesticide residues as well as contamination in terms of chemical, physical and biological continue to undermine the maximization of profits and improvement of socio-economic prospects. Yet, continuous training on ISO 22000:2018(E) can easily mitigate the situation and impact more households positively while ensuring financial performance for individual farmers. Many studies, such as those conducted by Rajagopalan (2021), El Bilali and Allahyari (2018), Matthews, Moran and Jaiswal (2021), Bunei *et al.* (2021), have found a nexus between quality training and organizational performance. However, these studies have their methodological, conceptual and contextual limitations. Interactive communication training continuity and system management training continuity are among the key measures of quality and performance mandated ISO 22000:2018(E). Therefore, the researchers saw a need to carry out the study on the effect of continuous training of ISO 22000-2018(E) certification on performance of tea firms in Nandi County, Kenya.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Nandi County in Kenya. It adopted cross-sectional study design and targeted 2988 employees from 21 tea firms in the County. The researchers deployed Taro Yamane's statistical formula (Yamane, 1973), using a confidence level of 95% and margin of error being 0.05, to sample 353 respondents out of the target population. The study employed proportionate stratified random sampling to select respondents to represent each of the 21 tea companies located in Nandi County. It further used structured questionnaires to collect primary data from the respondents. Data analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive data analysis utilized frequency and percentages as well as means and standard deviations. Inferential statistics used was mainly regression, which was applied in testing the hypotheses.

3.0 Results and Discussion

However, the study began by examining the dependent variable, which was the performance of tea firms. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate their responses to various statements concerning the impact of continuous training on different indicators of organizational performance. Table 1 shows the study findings.

Table 1: Performance of the Tea Firms

Proposition	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Continuous training has led to increased customer satisfaction	250	4	5	4.27	.444
Continuous training has led to meeting industry regulations	250	4	5	4.58	.495
Continuous training has led to transparency in terms of tea processing	250	3	5	4.35	.548
Continuous training has led to improved responses to risk	250	4	5	4.07	.252
Continuous training has led to improved response to risk and safety in our organization	250	4	5	4.62	.487
Overall averages				4.378	0.4452

Source: Field data (2022)

A mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of 0.444 was obtained from the assertion that continuous training had led to customer satisfaction, as shown in Table 1. Additionally, the proposition that continuous training had led to meeting industry regulation had significant factors of 4.58 and 0.495, representing mean and standard deviation, respectively. The statement that continuous training had led to transparency in terms of processing had a mean of 4.35 and standard deviation of 0.548. Furthermore, a mean of 4.07 and standard deviation of 0.252 were obtained on the assertion that continuous training had led to improved responses to risk. Further, the proposition that continuous training had led to improved response to risk and safety had 4.62 and 0.487 representing mean and standard deviation, respectively.

The next variable examined in the study as was the influence of interactive communication training continuity on organizational performance of tea companies in Nandi County, Kenya. The study results were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Interactive Communication Training Continuity

Proposition	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
We carry out continuous training on interactive communication through a variety of electronic media such as video conference and teleconference, face to face and also group sittings.	250	1	2	1.89	.316
The organization implements continuous training on communication policies that defines exchange of information in the organization.	250	1	2	1.28	.448
Our company implements continuous training on communication skills with the aim of enhancing communication between different department and channel members to reduce food safety risks.	250	1	3	2.06	.487
Our company implements continuous training on communication skills to ensure that both downward and upward communication are efficient hence minimal delays and improved food safety.	250	1	3	1.39	.593
Our company implements continuous training in communication to ensure supply chain integration hence making it easy to detect possible hazards which can then be mitigated to enhance food safety	250	1	3	1.41	.678
Overall averages				1.606	0.5044

Source: Field data (2022)

From Table 2, the proposition that continuous training on interactive communication was carried through a variety of electronic media such as video conference and teleconference, face-to-face and also group sittings had a mean of 1.89 and standard deviation of 0.316. Further, the assertion that the organization implements continuous training on communication policies that defines exchange of information in the organization had a mean of 1.28 and standard deviation of 0.448. Additionally, the statement that tea firms implement continuous training on communication skills with the aim of enhancing communication between different department and channel members to reduce food safety risks had 2.06 and 0.487 as mean and standard deviation, respectively. Moreover, the claim that the companies implement continuous training on communication skills to ensure that both downward and upward communication are efficient hence minimal delays and improved food safety had 1.39 and 0.593 for mean and standard deviation, in that order. Further, the view that companies implement continuous training in communication to ensure supply chain integration hence making it easy to detect possible hazards which can then be mitigated to enhance food safety had a mean of 1.41 and standard deviation of 0.678. The overall averages were 1.606 and 0.5044 representing mean and standard deviation, respectively. The average mean indicated that the impact of interactive communication training continuity was not strong. Meanwhile, the small standard deviation implied that responses were consistent and that there were no outliers that affected data.

The next variable examined in the study was the effect of system management training continuity on the organizational performance of tea companies in Nandi County, Kenya. The findings were as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: System Management Training Continuity

Proposition	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Our organization provides continuous training to all staff to help them understand the food safety management system	250	4	5	4.18	.385
Our company provides continuous training on food safety management system to the employees to help them effectively implement the food system as required	250	4	5	4.64	.480
Our company provides continuous training to employees to help them update and maintain the food system as required.	250	4	5	4.31	.464
Our company provides continuous training to our employees to help them conform to the stated food safety policy.	250	3	5	4.59	.702
Our company provides continuous training to our employees to demonstrate conformity to relevant stakeholders.	250	3	5	4.44	.626
Overall averages				4.432	0.5314

Source: Field data (2022)

As indicated in Table 3, the proposition that tea organizations provide continuous training to all staff to help them understand the food safety management system had 4.18 and 0.385 for mean and standard deviation, respectively. Additionally, the proposition that the tea companies provide continuous training on food safety management system to employees to help them effectively implement the food system as required had a mean of 4.64 and standard deviation of 0.480. Furthermore, the claim that tea companies provide continuous training to employees to help them update and maintain the food system as required had 4.31 and 0.464 representing the mean and standard deviation, in that order. In addition, the proposition that tea companies provide continuous training to employees to help them conform to the stated food safety policy garnered a mean of 4.59 and standard deviation of 0.702. Moreover, the statement that tea companies provide continuous training to employees to demonstrate conformity to relevant stakeholders had 4.44 and 0.626 for mean and standard deviation, respectively. The overall mean was 4.432 while the overall standard deviation was 0.5314. The high mean suggested that the influence of system management training continuity on performance was high while the small standard deviation indicated that the responses were consistent since there were no big variations.

3.1 Results from hypotheses tests

Table 4 presents the results of hypothesis tests for the influence of interactive communication training continuity and system management training continuity on the performance of tea companies in Nandi County.

Table 4: Regression of Coefficients of Excluded Variables

Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics
						Tolerance
	Interactive communication training continuity	-.034	-.217	.842	-.124	.038
1	System management training continuity	.458	1.075	.361	.527	.004

a, Dependent variable: performance of the tea firms
b, Predictors: excluded independent variables

The first objective of the study was to determine the effect of interactive communication training continuity on performance of tea firms in Nandi County, Kenya. The corresponding null hypothesis (H01) stated that *interactive communication training continuity has no effect on performance of tea firms in Nandi County*. From regression analysis, the study established that interactive communication training had an insignificant negative effect on performance (β =-.034, p=0.842). Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted because the p value was greater than 0.01. Therefore, the study affirmed that interactive communication training had an insignificant negative effect on performance. The study finding lend credence to the study conducted by Kohli (1985), who also established that interactive communication training improved the role of sales people and therefore improved performance.

The second objective of the study was to determine how system management training continuity affects the performance of tea firms in Nandi County, Kenya. The corresponding hypothetical proposition was that (H02) *system management training continuity affect does not performance of tea firms in Nandi County*. The findings of the study established that system management training continuity had an insignificant positive effect on performance (β =.458, p=0.361). As such, the null hypothesis was accepted given that the p value was greater than 0.01. Therefore, the study concluded that system management training continuity had insignificant positive effect on performance. The study findings were consistent with those findings Chen *et al*. (2020a) who also established that training on hazard identification through system management contributed to ISO certification.

4.0 Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that interactive communication training has an insignificant negative effect on organizational performance. This means that interactive communication training continuity has a role to play, albeit minimal, in tea firm performance in Nandi County. Interactive training continuity helps tea organizations to coordinate various departments and as such build synergy in communication that results in overall organization performance. Further, there is evidence to suggest that system management training continuity has an insignificant positive effect on performance. As such, the research concludes that system management training continuity has some role to play in performance of tea firms in Nandi County. System management training continuity, in this regard, provides a basis on which the organization systems work towards the same goal. Therefore, continuous training on such systems with the goal in mind leads to organizational performance in the wider scheme of things.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that policy makers, such as the national government as well as the county governments where tea is grown and processed, should formulate policies that integrate ISO 22000-2018(E) training continuity within the tea firms. Such policy should put priority on health and safety within tea processing from growing to final packaging. The study specifically recommends that the tea firms should ensure that interactive communication training continuity is enhanced to improve the organizational performance. Further, tea firms should also ensure that system management training continuity is enhanced within the tea firms and across the value chain.

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