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Effect of Contract Management on Performance of Market Development Projects in Meru County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The County government had set out its Integrated Development Plan for the 2018 to 2022 to implement various market development projects to reverse the weak business infrastructure in the county. Meru County intended to expand Nkubu and Ntharene Markets. Imenti North Sub County there were aims to establish a modern retail market at Gakoromone, while Buuri Sub County sought to expand Timau Market. Additionally, Igembe Sub County had plans to expand Kangeta Market. These projects did not get to completion as anticipated. As a result, this study sought to assess the effects of contract management practices on performance of market development projects in Meru County, Kenya. Steward theory led the research. It adopted a descriptive research design for the research methodology. The study targeted 410 officials directly involved in project implementation as respondents, who were selected using a simple random sampling method. The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to draw meaningful conclusions. The regression model coefficients revealed that the effect of contract management was not statistically significant. The study concludes that contract management is positively correlated with the performance of market development projects in Meru County, Kenya.

Key words; **contract, management, performance, stewardship**

1.0 Introduction

The strategies employed in decision-making processes for procurement and the overall management of this process could significantly affect the outcomes of projects. Conforming to various contract management approaches played a role in influencing both the quality of materials acquired and how efficiently organizations execute their projects (Hong & Kwon, 2018). On a global scale, procurement methods had often been criticized for their complexity and bureaucracy, which pose challenges for companies in achieving their objectives. This viewpoint had led to negative impacts on supplier morale, consequently reducing the efficiency of supply chain management. Kirigia (2018) had outlined various contract management approaches, including needs assessments, contract management, and integration of information and communication technology (ICT), nurturing supplier relationships, information sharing, and inventory management.

The impact of contract management on a company's success was significant. Enhancements in contract management methods could lead to improved organizational performance (Odero & Ayub, 2017; Ndei & Mutuku, 2021). Marshall, McCarthy, Claudy, and McGrath (2019) suggested that companies tend to choose contract management methods based on familiarity rather than what was most suitable for their business. Therefore, it was crucial for companies to select contract management strategies that align with their unique needs and value propositions. The importance of purchasing integration was growing, as it connected contract management processes with business outcomes. Contract management strategies played a pivotal role in achieving organizational success, directly impacting functional efficiency, supply chain performance, and overall performance. To enhance organizational performance, it was essential to streamline the entire contract management process and implement strategies like green purchasing. These streamlined methods boosted efficiency and foster trust among employees, customers, and stakeholders.

Transitioning from outdated to modern contract management techniques enabled continuous improvement and benchmarking, comparing a company's performance with industry leaders (Loosemore and Reid, 2019). Procurement had evolved from a routine process to a strategic function that reduced costs and maximizes savings. Consistently benchmarking was recommended for ongoing process improvement, shifting the focus from a company-centric approach to one that also considered the customer's perspective. Procurement should be closely linked with the development and implementation of Sustainable Procurement Policies, with a strong emphasis on integrating environmental and societal considerations into contract management activities (Vaidya & Campbell, 2016). Liu, Xue, Yang, and Shi (2019) advocated for the utilization of a comprehensive array of performance metrics encompassing quality, efficiency, productivity, profitability, and sustainability to evaluate organizational performance. They stressed the importance of integrating contract management into the broader organizational strategy.

Project performance was defined as the extent to which a project achieves its predetermined objectives, targets, and goals. The process of assessing how efficiently and effectively activities were carried out within the project was known as project performance measurement (Dainty, Cheng & Moore, 2019). In the words of Grau, Back, and Prince (2020), project performance involved the evaluation of project activities, where estimation was the method of measurement, and these activities drive the execution of the project. In essence, project performance served as a metric to gauge how well a project, when completed, aligned with its predefined objectives, targets, and goals.

As pointed out by Barclay and Osei-Bryson (2018) and Mutuku (2019), performance measurement was a valuable tool for evaluating performance and providing organizations with insights into both past project successes and failures. This understanding could be leveraged to prepare for future enhancements and advancements. Furthermore, project performance measurement played a crucial role in facilitating benchmarking, as highlighted by Walker and Nogeste (2018). By comparing project performance, organizations could identify strategies to significantly reduce project duration, lower project costs, and meet project scope more effectively. Additionally, accurately categorizing projects based on similar criteria and characteristics was essential for measuring and enhancing project performance.

Chang and Ibbs (2018) emphasized the crucial role of meeting project requirements in project management. Evaluating this aspect involved creating measures of fit, indicating a complete fulfillment of demands. Customer satisfaction signified meeting customer expectations, achieved through adhering to specifications and delivering what was promised. Chen et al. (2018) argued that project performance measurements provide data for supervisors to exercise control over the project. These measurements was tailored to the organizational level where they promptly instigated changes based on the gathered information.

Several factors in Kenya impact the performance of projects, including corruption, political influences, financial misappropriation, misaligned priorities, tribalism, nepotism, and limited technological advancements (World Bank, 2012). According to a report by UNDP (2010) that aimed to identify the reasons behind the failure of many public sector projects, factors like nepotism and tribalism hinder performance of the project, while the new constitution had taken steps to address nepotism, these issues still persist in Kenya today. Additionally, the new constitution had contributed to development by establishing devolution, resulting in the creation of Meru County and 46 other counties. With a focus on devolution, development projects had been brought closer to the people, particularly benefiting marginalized regions and individuals at the grassroots level.

According to a report issued by the Government of Kenya (GOK, 2014), there had been noticeable improvements in various sectors, such as infrastructure, water projects, mining activities, education, and healthcare services, despite the persistent issue of nepotism. Additionally, county governments had gained more autonomy in planning and executing development initiatives, collecting taxes for funding projects, and ensuring a steady flow of resources. The national government had also allocated deficit budgets based on factors like population and needs (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

However, project performance in the counties fell short of expected standards due to several factors. These included a lack of clear internal communication structures and public institutional rules, inadequate staffing, and minimal motivation for timely payments, or sometimes no payment at all. These issues had significantly contributed to project failures and delays. It was noteworthy that the country faced a major challenge in terms of contract management practices in government projects, and there had been no studies focusing on this area to provide recommendations for addressing the situation. This study sought to address practices that may help in improved performance of government projects in Kenya by looking at market projects in Meru County.

The County Government of Meru had various strategies in place to enhance the growth of market infrastructure in each of the nine Sub Counties. For instance, in Imenti South Sub County, there were plans to expand Nkubu and Ntharene Markets. Imenti North Sub County there were aims to establish a modern retail market at Gakoromone, while Buuri Sub County sought to expand Timau Market. Additionally, Igembe Sub County had plans to expand Kangeta Market. The development of other Sub Counties such as Tigania East and Tigania west was taken into account during Meru county Annual Development Plans (ADP) throughout the five-year plan. Majority of these projects virtually all of them were under construction despite the lapse of the time given and some were left by the contractors half way due tom lack of payment. It was against this background this study sought to assess the effect of contract management practices on performance of such projects in Meru County.

Numerous contractors had faced challenges or underperformed, especially in construction and maintenance projects (Mashwama, Mushatu & Aigbavboa, 2018). This had prompted governmental intervention, including the implementation of performance contracts and the establishment of oversight authorities to monitor contractor performance closely. Conversely, inadequate government project performance was attributed to issues like deficient financial management and subpar service delivery to citizens (Dwomoh & Amoah, 2021; im & Mutuku, 2022). Evaluating a market project contractor's performance could involve various methods, including assessments of time, cost, and other performance indicators.

The primary reasons for contractor failures often stemmed from issues with resource management, and occasionally, political interference (Chilala & Mulenga, 2017). Additionally, a multitude of factors and occurrences contribute to these challenges.

In the County Integrated Development Plan 2018-2022, the Meru County government had proposed several Market construction projects, such as the Gakoromone Modern Retail Markets, expanding Ntharene Market, Timau Market, and Nkubu and Kangeta. Regrettably, these projects were not completed, with some left unfinished and unused. A study by Tabassi, Abdullah, and Bryde (2019) examined contract management practices in the Malaysian construction industry and their impact on project performance, specifically focusing on how these practices affected project progress. Similarly, Njaombe (2022) explores the impact of contract management practices on the performance of county governments in Kenya. The study suggested that inventory management, procurement planning, supplier management, and contract management were positively correlated with the performance of county governments.

However, it was crucial to note that Tabassi, Abdullah, and Bryde (2019) study relied on secondary data and might not had addressed specific research needs. Thus, the present study aimed to investigate how contract management practices influence the performance of market development projects in the Meru County Government, with a particular focus on addressing the gaps identified in previous research.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature

Donaldson and Davis (1991 & 1993) posited that stewardship theory offers a fresh and insightful lens through which to examine the intricate dynamics between ownership structures and corporate governance practices within organizational frameworks. It stood as a pivotal and noteworthy alternative to the dominant Agency Theory paradigm. According to this theoretical framework, stewards were entrusted with the paramount responsibility of advancing shareholder value by diligently safeguarding and enhancing the firm's resources through effective performance. Stewards, as depicted within this conceptual framework, were portrayed as proactive and conscientious leaders who were deeply committed to safeguarding and augmenting profits for the benefit of shareholders. Stewardship theory underscored the managerial role as stewards, highlighting their objectives and priorities as deeply intertwined with the overarching interests of the company. Moreover, it emphasized the critical importance of governance structures that actively involve stewards and afford them substantial autonomy, predicated on a foundation of trust and accountability. This theoretical perspective accentuated the indispensable role of employees in operating autonomously to drive and optimize shareholder returns, thus obviating the need for excessive monitoring and regulation of employee behavior. Furthermore, stewardship theory carried significant implications for an organization's procurement management practices, as managers were tasked with the imperative responsibility of ensuring consistent and exemplary performance across all dimensions of the organization.

Within the purview of stewardship theory, managers employed by public entities such as the County Government of Meru were conceptualized as stewards whose actions were intrinsically aligned with the interests and welfare of their beneficiaries, who serve as the principal stakeholders. Consequently, these managers derive fulfillment and satisfaction from the County Government of Meru's role in providing a conducive and enabling market environment for its citizens. This hypothesis retained its relevance and significance within the context of the review, as it underscored the critical importance of empowering and enabling employees to operate autonomously in order to maximize shareholder returns and optimize organizational performance. Thus, the conceptual framework advocated by stewardship theory underscored the imperative of conducting comprehensive needs assessments to empower employees to act independently and autonomously, thereby driving and enhancing shareholder profits and organizational success.

2.2 Contract Management

Contract management encompassed a wide range of activities, leading to multiple definitions from various perspectives. It involved several key components, including negotiating contract terms, ensuring compliance, documenting changes, and handling deviations from the original contract (Vander Will, 2013). Effective contract management also involved evaluating vendor performance against established contracts to ensure the successful completion of projects. In today's business landscape, where companies were narrowing their pool of suppliers, managing a single supplier contract requires strategic decision-making, as this supplier becomes the sole source for necessary products or services, critical for the organization's operations (Michael Hugos, 2012).

Maintaining a robust system for monitoring company performance was essential for supplier management within the framework of agreed-upon contracts. As Michael Hugos (2012) suggested, companies routinely gathered data on supplier performance at various contract stages, establishing specific performance criteria. Based on these assessments, firms should identify underperforming suppliers and take corrective actions to improve their performance. Suppliers themselves actively tracked their performance and proactively take corrective measures at an early stage.

A research that was carried out by Mutua, Waiganjo, and Oteyo (2015) looked at the influence that contract management had on project outsourcing in central production plants located in Nairobi County, Kenya. Participating in the survey were all of the medium-sized manufacturing companies that had their headquarters in Nairobi. Twenty of the twenty-two companies that were targeted replied, which resulted in a response rate of 90.91 percent. According to the research, there was a widespread practice of outsourcing projects, with product development, advertising, and data innovation being the most common categories. The findings of the research, on the other hand, suggested that the overall performance of the project was fairly pleasing and was positively impacted by contract management.

The purpose of Salome's (2018) study was to explore the relationship between the practices of contract management and the performance of home development projects in Nairobi City County. Sixty-six individuals who were engaged in housing development projects that were supervised by the National Construction Authority participated in the research. The primary data was gathered via a survey, and the results indicated that there was a substantial beneficial association between the techniques of contract administration and the success of the project.

The influence of contract management on project outsourcing at central production plants in Nairobi County, Kenya, was investigated in a research that was carried out by Mutua, Waiganjo, and Oteyo (2015) respectively. For the purpose of the research, all medium-sized manufacturing companies with headquarters in Nairobi were eligible to participate. There were twenty companies that were targeted, and twenty of them replied, which results in a response rate of 90.91 percent. Product development, advertising, and data innovation were found to be the most common forms of project outsourcing, according to the research. Nevertheless, the findings of the research suggested that the overall performance of the project was sufficiently pleasing and was impacted by the management of contracts.

Within the context of Nairobi City County, Salome (2018) conducted research to evaluate the relationship between contract management strategies and the performance of home development projects. There were 66 people who participated in the research, all of them were from housing construction projects that were supervised by the National Construction Authority. A survey was used to gather primary data, which revealed that there was a very strong positive association between the techniques of contract administration and the success of the project.

Specifically, the Rwandex-Remera Road building Project was the focus of the investigation that Nsanzimana and Mulyungi (2020) conducted to investigate the influence that contract management practices had on the execution of Kigali Road building projects. For the purpose of this study, descriptive research techniques were used, and 62 persons were targeted. These individuals included project managers, contractors, clients, and professionals working for the Rwandan Transport Development Authority. It was necessary to utilize a census sampling method since the population was quite tiny. According to the findings of the research, there were significant and significant positive relationships between management procedures and the effectiveness of the road building project between Remera and Rwanda.

3.0 Materials and Methods

3.1 The materials

The objective of this study was to examine the influence of contract management practices on the performance of market development projects within the County Government of Meru. To achieve this, a descriptive survey research design was used, as described by Bloomfield and Fisher (2019), which involves collecting and analyzing data through field observation without making any changes. This approach allowed the researcher to gather and analyze information directly from the respondents, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study objectives.

The focus of this research was on all the market projects initiated by the Meru County government from 2018 to 2023. The individuals participating in the study were selected from the market management committees and their leadership, consisting of 410 officials across different levels of management within these committees.

Table 1: Target Population

Sub Counties	**Markets**	**Population**	**Percentage**
Imenti South Sub County	Nkubu fresh produce market	10	2.4
	Keria fresh produce Market	10	2.4
	Ntharene fresh produce market	40	9.8
	Katheri Market	40	9.8
Imenti North Sub County	Gakoromone Market	42	10.3
	Kinoru Market	18	4.4
Imenti central Sub County	Kariene Market	30	7.3
	Equator market	10	2.4
Buuri Sub County	Kirua market	35	8.5
	Timau market	25	6.1
Tigania Sub County	Nchiru Market	25	6.1
	Kangeta Market,	25	6.1
Igembe Sub County	Maua Cereals and Fruits Market	25	6.1
	Mutuati Fresh produce market	25	6.1
	Athiru Ruujine Market,	10	2.4
Tigania East Sub County	Mikinduri Cereals and Livestock market,	25	6.1

	Kiguchwa Market	15	3.7
Total		**410**	**100**

Source: Meru CIDP, 2018-2022

3.2 Methods

The initial step involved coding the collected data for streamlined analysis. Subsequently, the coded data was inputted into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to facilitate analysis. Quantitative data underwent both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were depicted through frequencies, mean, standard deviation, and percentages. Inferential statistics encompassed several linear regression methods to demonstrate the influence of independent variables on the pivotal variable under scrutiny. The regression model employed adhered to a specific format;

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

Where; Y - Project performance

X_1 – contract management

β_0 - Constant Term;

β_1 - coefficients of beta values; ε = Error Term.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The study's respondents, who were market management committees, project managers and project team leaders from the Meru County Government Trade department, were given a total of 123 questionnaires. 108 questionnaires were completed and returned out of these. This indicates an 87.8% overall response rate. According to Fincham's (2008) recommendations, this response rate is within the acceptable range of 70% and above for executing statistical analyses to allow for the conclusions to be generalized.

4.2 Contract Management

The next objective of this study was to determine how contract management affects performance of market development projects in Meru County. Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations of the responses on this variable.

Table 2: Descriptive Results on Contract Management

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
With the correct validation and certification tools, a contact management system has enabled significantly improved efficacy in supplier onboarding.	18.2%	4.5%	20.5%	29.5%	27.3%	3.43	1.42
Content management has made it possible to easily identify contracts with diverse vendors inside the County.	6.8%	15.9%	22.7%	27.3%	27.3%	3.52	1.25
A contract management system has aided in the reduction of legal fees and the elimination of unplanned renewals of undesirable services.	6.8%	11.4%	31.8%	20.5%	29.5%	3.55	1.23
A contract management system has enabled the tracking of crucial project milestones.	9.1%	11.4%	34.1%	29.5%	15.9%	3.32	1.16

A contract management system has supplied users with automated alerts and features that allow them to schedule notifications as needed.	9.1%	4.5%	15.9%	38.6%	31.8%	3.8	1.21

Source: Researcher (2024).

The results of the study in table 2 indicated that majority of the respondents as represented by a mean of 3.43 moderately agreed that with the correct validation and certification tools, a contact management system has enabled significantly improved efficacy in supplier onboarding with only 18.2 percent of the respondents strongly disagreeing. However, concerning this assertion, there was a notable variation in responses, evidenced by a standard deviation of 1.42. Regarding whether content management has facilitated the easy identification of contracts with various vendors within the County, indicated by a mean score of 3.52, the largest proportion (27.3%) moderately agreed, while a standard deviation of 1.25 suggests a wide spread of responses among participants.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the majority of respondents, constituting 31.8 percent with a mean score of 3.55, moderately agreed that a contract management system has contributed to the reduction of legal fees and the prevention of unplanned renewals of undesirable services. However, a standard deviation value of 1.23 indicates that the responses were not notably clustered around the mean.

Another inquiry aimed to ascertain whether a contract management system has facilitated the tracking of critical project milestones, where the largest proportion of respondents, accounting for 34.1 percent with a mean score of 3.32, moderately agreed. Once again, a standard deviation value of 1.16 reveals that the responses were dispersed from the mean value.

The last statement sought to establish whether a contract management system has supplied users with automated alerts and features that allow them to schedule notifications as needed. In this case, the largest proportion of respondents, 38.6% and mean 3.8 agreed. However, as with most of the other statement, responses to the above statement were not clustered around the mean of 3.8 as confirmed by a standard deviation of 1.21.

4.3 Correlation Results of Study Variables

The study conducted a correlation analysis to determine the relationship between contract management practices and performance of market development projects in Meru County, Kenya using Pearson correlation coefficient. The Pearson correlation coefficient, r, ranges from +1 to -1 with values closer to either value indicating strong positive or negative association respectively. The study findings on correlation are as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Results on Pearson Correlation Analysis

		Contract Management	**Project Performance**
Contract Management	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	108	
Project Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.492*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0001	
	N	108	108

Source: Researcher (2024).

As indicated in table 3, there was a moderate positive and significant relationship between contract management and performance of market development projects in Meru County, Kenya (R = 0.492, p=0.001) whereby a positive variation in contract management results to positive and significant change in performance of market development projects in Meru County.

4.4 Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model was employed with summary findings shown in table 4 to determine the effect of procurement management practices on the performance of market development projects in Meru County, Kenya.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.705[a]	0.497	0.445	0.743

a. Predictors: (Constant), Contract management

Source: Researcher (2024).

The summary of the model results reveals that contract management practices exerted a robust positive impact on the performance of market development projects in Meru County, as evidenced by a collective Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.705. The coefficient of determination (Rsquare) stands at 0.497, indicating that contract management practices explain up to 49.7% of the variance in the performance of market development projects in Meru County. Further details regarding the significance of the model are provided in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance

Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	4.342	4	1.085	9.967	.000[b]
	Residual	50.772	104	0.552		
	Total	55.113	108			

a. Dependent Variable: Project Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Contract management

Source: Researcher (2024).

The findings suggest that the overall model was statistically significant. Moreover, they indicate that contract management practices serve as reliable predictors of the performance of market development projects in Meru County. This assertion is supported by an F statistic of 9.626, surpassing the critical value of F (4, 39) at 2.462, and a reported p-value of 0.000, which is below the conventional significance level of 0.05. These results imply that contract management practices, effectively forecast changes in the performance of market development projects in Meru County, Kenya. Detailed regression coefficients are provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.024	0.77		1.33	0.191
Contract management	0.112	0.165	0.099	0.676	0.503

a Dependent Variable: Project Performance

Source: Researcher (2024).

Thus, the optimal regression model with significant only coefficients is:

The regression results as shown in Table 6 indicate that contract management practices were found to positively influence the performance of market development projects in Meru County, as evidenced by a beta value of 0.112. However, this influence is deemed statistically insignificant, as indicated by a p-value of 0.503, which exceeds the threshold of 0.05. This suggests that, all else being equal, enhancements in contract management practices result in an insignificant improvement in the performance of market development projects in Meru County. These results align with the findings of Nsanzimana and Mulyungi (2020), who identified a positive correlation between contract management processes and the success of the Remera-Rwandex road construction project.

5.1 Conclusion

The study asserts that, despite the non-significant impact of contract management on the performance of market development projects in Meru County, the overall effect remains positive. Consequently, the performance of road construction projects benefits from several factors including the use of accurate validation and certification tools, the facilitation of easy identification of contracts with diverse vendors, the reduction of legal fees, the elimination of unplanned renewals of undesirable services, the tracking of crucial project milestones, and the provision of automated alerts and features.

5.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that Meru County prioritizes enhancing contract management practices to enhance the performance of market development projects. This can be achieved by utilizing appropriate validation and certification tools, streamlining the identification of contracts with multiple suppliers, reducing expenditures on legal services, preventing unexpected service renewals, monitoring critical project milestones, and leveraging automated features and notifications.

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