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THE RELEVANCE OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMS ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF THE AIRPORT POLICE BRANCH IN MALAWI

Gerald Masula¹, Dr. Godfrey Sekula Mpundu²

¹ Master of Business Administration in Human Resource Management (MBA-HRM), DMI-St. Eugene University, Chibombo, Zambia

Email: geraldmasula@gmail.com

² Co-Author's Name

Doctorate in Management Studies, Longacres, Lusaka, Zambia

Email: godfreysekula@gmail.com

ABSTRACT :

Employee orientation is a very critical practice in the management of human resource. It assists in integrating new staff in the current work environment, it helps them acquire essential knowledge and perform effectively. This study examined the relevance of orientation programs on employee performance within the Airport Police Branch (APB) of the Malawi Police Service. A quantitative descriptive research design was adopted, and structured questionnaires were administered to 99 respondents. In the end, the findings revealed that the orientation programs significantly enhanced the confidence of the officers in the APB, teamwork was improved, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were observed as a result of the orientation, and there was accuracy in task execution, leading to minimum errors.

On the other hand, the study revealed some of the weaknesses, including outdated training materials, irregular delivery, and weak supervisor involvement. The conclusion of this study is that orientation is essential for operational readiness in security-sensitive contexts. The recommendations from the study are; updating orientation content, integrating scenario-based learning, standardizing frameworks across units, and strengthening mentorship to improve long-term performance. The findings of the study contribute to the body of knowledge in several key areas and aspects organizational management, including human resource development in policing and aviation security.

Keywords: Orientation, Employee Performance, Airport Police, Malawi, Onboarding, Human Resource Development.

Introduction

Orientation of employees is sometimes referred to as onboarding or induction, is defined as the structured process of introducing new employees to organizational culture, values, policies, and job roles. Effective orientation allows staff who have just joined to understand expectations, develop confidence, and adapt quickly to their work environment. In public security institutions such as the police, where tasks are highly sensitive and errors may compromise safety, orientation is particularly vital.

The Malawi Police Service (MPS), through its Airport Police Branch (APB), is tasked with safeguarding airports across the country. APB officers are responsible for overseeing passenger screening, inspection of baggage, controlling access points, and coordinating with aviation authorities. These responsibilities require high standards of discipline, technical skill, and teamwork. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that orientation practices within the APB are inconsistent. While some officers within the Airport Police Branch receive formal induction covering policies and operational procedures, others join duties with minimal or delayed orientation.

This study examines the relevance of orientation programs in improving employee performance within the Airport Police Branch. In particular, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the structure and coverage of orientation programs within the Airport Police Branch.
2. Examine the relationship between orientation and employee performance.
3. Identify challenges affecting the effectiveness of orientation programs.
4. Recommend strategies to strengthen onboarding for improved security operations in the workplace setting.

By meeting these objectives, the study sheds light on how a well-structured induction helps officers settle into their roles more smoothly, build confidence in their daily tasks, and develop a clearer understanding of security procedures. This, in turn, strengthens overall performance and supports a safer, as well as a more efficient working environment within aviation law enforcement settings.

Literature Review

Orientation and Employee Performance

Research has consistently linked orientation to positive employee outcomes. Bauer (2010) demonstrated that structured onboarding enhances job satisfaction, performance, and retention. Chao (1997) emphasized the role of socialization theory, where new employees adapt more effectively through guided learning, peer support, and exposure to organizational norms.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) argued that orientation should extend beyond technical knowledge to include behavioural competencies such as teamwork and communication. Khandelwal (2011) further confirmed that structured orientation enhances role clarity, which is directly linked to task efficiency.

African Experiences in Orientation

African public institutions face unique challenges in onboarding. Okolie (2015) observed that orientation in the Nigerian Police Force was often irregular and poorly resourced, undermining service delivery. Similarly, Van der Westhuizen (2016) found that South African police officers who underwent structured induction committed fewer procedural errors, especially in aviation security operations. These findings suggest that well-organized orientation can strengthen law enforcement capacity in high-risk environments.

Orientation in Other Sectors

Beyond policing, corporate research also supports onboarding as a driver of performance. Saks and Gruman (2011) found that standardized induction frameworks increase employee engagement and organizational commitment. Klein and Heuser (2008) highlighted the importance of aligning orientation with organizational culture to ease integration.

Gaps in Existing Studies

Despite these findings, scholars such as Wanous and Reichers (2000) note that there are some persistent challenges, such as outdated materials, generic programs, and limited supervisor involvement. In law enforcement contexts, weak post-orientation mentoring often results in skills fading over time. Few studies, however, have examined onboarding in Malawi's security sector, particularly within the Airport Police Branch (APB). This study addresses that gap by exploring how orientation influences performance in a high-security aviation setting.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design. The design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to collect quantifiable data and describe the current orientation practices of the Airport Police Branch (APB), while exploring their relationship with employee performance (Creswell, 2014).

Population and Sample

The population comprised all police officers serving under the Airport Police Branch across Malawi's airports. A total of 99 officers were purposively sampled. Officers who were present in their respective duty points during the data collection period, regardless of whether or not, they had undergone some form of orientation program, and were actively engaged in airport policing were included. This sampling strategy ensured that participants had different and very relevant experiences.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into three sections:

1. **Demographic Information:** age, gender, rank, years of service.
2. **Orientation Experiences:** timing, duration, structure, and supervisor involvement.
3. **Performance Indicators:** confidence, punctuality, teamwork, task accuracy, and compliance with procedures.

Most items were Likert-scale questions to capture levels of agreement. Secondary sources such as training manuals, policy documents, and internal reports were also reviewed to support the collected data.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in human resource management and training within the Malawi Police Service to establish content validity. A pilot test was conducted with 5 officers who were outside the study sample. Adjustments were made for clarity. Internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which produced a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Data Collection Procedure

Upon securing a formal approval from the management of the Malawi Police Service, the university Research Department and Ethics board, data collection exercise was carried out. Questionnaires were distributed in both electronic and printed form. Officers were given the questionnaires and were expected to respond and return the same day. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. To ensure confidentiality, personal identified were not recorded in any way.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using SPSS (Version 20). Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages were used to summarize demographic data and orientation practices. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to determine relationships between orientation and performance indicators. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. presentation of the findings was done using illustrations of tables and figures.

Ethical Considerations

Respect and principles of ethics were upheld in this study, confidentiality was observed, and participation was on a voluntary basis. Respondents had the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. Data were securely stored and used strictly for academic purposes.

Results

Response rate

The response rate was calculated based on the number of questionnaires distributed and the number of questionnaires returned. It was discovered that there was a 100% response rate, as shown in the table below;

Method	Targeted response	Actual response	Response rate
Questionnaire	99	99	100%
Total	99	99	100%

Source: Primary data

Participation in the orientation

It was revealed that a total of about 91% had undergone the orientation program upon joining the Airport Police Branch.

	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Those who were oriented	90	90.9%
Those who were not oriented	9	9.1%

Source: Primary data

Timing of the orientation program

The findings revealed that 91% of officers received orientation within their first week of posting, as indicated in the table.

Timing	Frequency	Percentage
First week	90	90.9%
Second week	0	0%
No orientation	9	9.1%
Total	99	100%

Source: Primary data

Duration of the orientation

As per the findings, most of the times, the orientation sessions lasted between 1–2 weeks.

Orientation duration	Frequency	Percentage
One week	21	21.2%
Two weeks	60	60.6%
More than two weeks	18	18.2%
Total	99	100%

Source: Primary data

Structure of the orientation

Th study revealed that orientation combined classroom learning and on-the-job training, though the balance varied by unit.

Content and Effectiveness

The orientation program at the Airport Police Branch (APB) covered a broad range of operational and procedural areas relevant to policing within the aviation environment. Some of the key topics that were covered in the program included airport security protocols, passenger screening procedures, baggage handling processes, and the correct use of specialized security equipment. This comprehensive coverage ensured that new officers were introduced to the essential tasks and responsibilities they would encounter in their daily duties.

In terms of effectiveness, the majority of respondents expressed positive views about the orientation they received. A total of 89.9% of the officers surveyed agreed that the orientation program effectively prepared them for their assigned duties. They reported that the sessions provided the necessary information and practical exposure to enable them to operate confidently in their respective roles.

Furthermore, 85.9% of the respondents indicated that the orientation improved their confidence levels and enhanced their clarity regarding their specific responsibilities within the organization. This demonstrates that well-structured orientation programs play a critical role in building employees' self-assurance and ensuring a clear understanding of work expectations, which is particularly important in security-sensitive environments such as airports.

Supervisor Involvement

On the level of supervisory involvement in the orientation, the study revealed that only 24.4% reported strong supervisor support. About 50.5% officers indicated moderate involvement of the supervisors, while many highlighted weak mentorships after training.

Supervisor involvement	Frequency	Percentage
Very involved	24	24.4%
Somehow involved	50	50.5%
Not involved	25	25.1%
Total	99	100%

Source: Primary data

Performance Impact

The orientation program had a notable positive effect on employee performance within the Airport Police Branch (APB). Over 90% of respondents rated their post-orientation performance as either good or very good, indicating a high level of preparedness and competence following the training. In addition, 74.7% of officers reported executing tasks without errors, demonstrating that the program contributed to greater accuracy and adherence to procedures.

The orientation also positively influenced key workplace behaviours. Officers reported significant improvements in punctuality, reflecting enhanced discipline and time management, as well as in teamwork, suggesting that the program fostered stronger collaboration and coordination among colleagues. These outcomes underscore the importance of structured orientation programs in equipping personnel not only with technical skills but also with behavioural competencies that are critical in a security-sensitive environment.

Overall, the findings indicate that comprehensive and well-delivered orientation programs can directly impact operational effectiveness, reduce mistakes, and strengthen team cohesion, ultimately contributing to higher standards of performance within aviation policing contexts.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a strong positive relationship between orientation programs and performance indicators such as punctuality, task accuracy, and compliance with procedures ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The findings affirm that orientation plays a significant role in enhancing employee performance at the APB. Structured onboarding increased role clarity, confidence, and punctuality, consistent with Bauer (2010) and Khandelwal (2011). The results also align with Van der Westhuizen (2016), who found that proper orientation reduced procedural errors in aviation policing.

However, weaknesses were evident. Limited supervisor involvement supports Wanous and Reichers (2000) critique that poor post-orientation support diminishes program effectiveness. Similarly, outdated training modules mirror Okolie's (2015) findings in Nigeria, where induction lacked sufficient resources. The lack of soft-skills training, such as customer service and communication, highlights a gap, as frontline officers must interact with passengers and stakeholders effectively.

These gaps suggest that orientation must be dynamic, continuously updated, and complemented by mentoring. In aviation security, where risks evolve rapidly, failure to adapt orientation content may compromise national security and passenger safety.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that orientation programs significantly enhance employee performance within the Airport Police Branch of Malawi. Structured

induction improved confidence, punctuality, teamwork, and task accuracy, directly contributing to operational readiness. Nonetheless, gaps such as outdated content, inconsistent delivery, and weak supervisor involvement limit program effectiveness.

To address these challenges, the study recommends:

1. Updating training materials regularly to reflect emerging aviation threats.
2. Incorporating scenario-based and practical exercises.
3. Standardizing orientation frameworks across the units in the Airport Police Branch
4. Strengthening post-orientation mentorship through supervisor engagement.

Facilitating the implementation of these measures would significantly improve the morale of employees, by fostering a supportive and well-informed work environment, reduce operational errors through improved knowledge and procedural clarity, and sustain long-term operational effectiveness in aviation policing by ensuring that officers are consistently well-prepared to handle security challenges.

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