

Influence of Communication Strategy on Service Delivery in Water and Sewerage Companies in Mount Kenya Region, Kenya

Grace Nyambura Wachira*, Dr. Susan Nzioki, Mr. Michael Kiama

Department of Business Administration, School of Business, Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

***Corresponding Author:** Grace Nyambura Wachira, Department of Business Administration, School of Business, Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

Abstract: Change management has been found to affect service delivery. Effective communication is the efficient flow of information throughout an organisation to guarantee that the intended message is properly conveyed. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. In this study, water and sewerage companies in Mt Kenya Region were the units of observation while their employees and their customers are the units of analysis. A sample of 384 respondents drawn from 28 companies was used. A semi structured questionnaire was used as the choice instrument for data collection. Descriptive and regression analysis were used to analyse data with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science. Data presentation was done through tables and figures. The study found a strong positive correlation ($r=0.820$) between the communication strategy and service delivery. Communication strategy was found to significantly ($p < 0.001$) contribute to explaining the variance in service delivery. Communication strategy was also found to be a highly significant predictor of service delivery, with a positive coefficient of 0.774. The study concluded that communication strategy has a significant influence on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region. Management of water and sewerage companies should therefore provide their managers with the necessary communication.

Keywords: Change management, Communication, Communication strategy, service delivery, water service companies

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's fierce rivalry among service providers on the worldwide market drives businesses in the sector to continually work to build, manage, and preserve positive client connections in order to outperform their rivals (Nekesa & Wanjira, 2020). The term "service delivery" is often used to refer to the process of providing inhabitants with utilities including housing, water, energy, and land. It is based on the choices taken, the assets at hand, and the staff on hand to guarantee that results are produced. Public organisations have long been criticised for their inefficiency in service delivery and lack of efficacy (Ontiri, 2018).

Service delivery, as defined by Garcia et al. (2019), is an aspect of doing business that explains the exchange of value between a provider and a recipient of a service (such as information or a completed job). Shittu (2020) defines service delivery as the extent to which the following sectors' services meet or exceed the expectations of their respective recipients. Service delivery processes often aim to increase value for the client by standardising the company's operations and interactions with the client. According to Bhutta (2019), most firms now utilise service delivery as a proxy for customer happiness.

Globally, state corporations in the world have been registering poor service delivery. According to a study by Gumah et al. (2020), ratings for government schools and the rural police force have somewhat increased from the sixth round's 46.7% and 42.2%, respectively. Additionally, a decline in the police and public healthcare systems' inefficiency scores has been seen. According to van den Bekerom et al. (2021), consumers penalise public organisations more harshly than private organisations for poor performance information, although this tendency is concentrated among customers who favour private service delivery and varies between service sectors. The provision of services is still a major problem in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). A study by Afrobarometer (2019)

found that Africans are more likely to see improvements than deterioration in state delivery of key public services. In Kenya studies by Eregae et al. (2019), Wanyanga (2019) and Namasaka et al. (2020) found poor service delivery by institutions such as county governments and parastatals.

Change management has been found to affect service delivery. The quality of services provided to customers is enhanced when businesses successfully manage strategic transformation (Mulinge, 2021). Kiplagat (2016) observed that the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs improved service performance via the use of management practises such as leadership, stakeholder engagement, employee participation in the change process, and communication. Strategic vision, strategic leadership, open lines of communication, and employee empowerment were all shown to have favourable, statistically significant associations with ERP deployment by Mudanya (2018).

According to Deszca et al. (2019), effective communication is the efficient flow of information throughout an organisation to guarantee that the intended message is properly conveyed. The purpose, vision, and goals of the organisation must be reflected in the communication strategy. The organisational stakeholders, level within the organisation, communication routes, measureability of effectiveness, and timeliness are all considered by the communication strategy. Information may be communicated verbally, in writing, or by any other means (Lewis, 2019). Part of every effective communication strategy is a well-thought-out plan for achieving the desired results. The four key parts of a communication strategy are goals, audience, strategy, and channels (Hayes, 2018).

A nation's economic and social growth depends on the availability of water that is both dependable and adequate in quantity and quality (Kenya Markets Trust (KMT), 2021). The provision of appropriate supplies of clean water and access to latrines is guaranteed as a human right under Kenya's constitution. In April of 2017, the Water Act 2016 became law, marking the most recent significant shift in the water business. The 2010 Kenyan Constitution mandated the devolution of water and sanitation services to county governments; the new law brought national water management and service delivery into conformity with these mandates. According to the Water Services Regulatory Board (WASREB, 2022) the provision of water services is now the responsibility of the counties that are the WSPs' owners.

Numerous inefficiencies in the water supplied at the utility level impede the successful delivery of services (KMT, 2021). Recent data indicates that the pace of water supply improvement is unlikely to sustain the country's long-term development objectives, despite the Kenyan government's attempts to expand water coverage nationwide so that the nation's economic growth is unhindered. Only 55% of Kenyans have access to clean, safe drinking water as a consequence. The primary issues facing WSPs include high costs associated with non-revenue water, low metering of connections, ineffective revenue collection, high expenses associated with operation and maintenance, governance issues, inadequate financing, and poor service quality (Chepyegon & Kamiya, 2018; Kanda et al., 2018). In Mt Kenya region, customer satisfaction surveys conducted by WSPs show scores below the target of 80%. For instance, TEAWASCO (2017) recorded a customer satisfaction score of 40.5%. In Nyeri, NYEWASCO (2022) survey established that majority (66.2%) of the respondents were uncomfortable with tariffs charged on water. Elsewhere Mathira Water and Sanitation Company Limited (MAWASCO) (2020) customer satisfaction survey revealed that customers were not satisfied due to poor customer care. Findings from other companies showed complaints of water rationing and approximation of water readings. This is an indication of poor service delivery. This compromises access to safe drinking water and sanitation which are internationally recognized human rights. There have been a few studies done to try to figure out what exactly is wrong with the water service industry as a whole. This study seeks to determine the influence of communication strategy on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region.

H₀₄ Communication strategy has no significant influence on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Eden et al. (2020) state that descriptive survey research design describes the situation regarding the variables under study. The research design was considered appropriate in establishing the relationship between the study variables. the measurement of associations between variables (Bell et al. 2022; Ghauri et al., 2020).

2.2. Target Population

In this study, water and sewerage companies in Mt Kenya Region were the units of observation while their employees and their customers are the units of analysis. There are 28 water and sewerage companies in Mt Kenya Region (WASREB, 2022). Employees in these companies as well as their customers were the respondents in the study.

2.3. Sampling

Slovin's formula was used to calculate the sample size

$$n = N / (1 + N e^2)$$

where "n" represents the sample size, "N" represents the population while e is the margin of error

Therefore, in a population of 8400 employees

$$n = 8400 / (1 + 8400 * 0.05^2) = 381$$

The study used a sample of 381 respondents.

To obtain a representative sample of customers, a sample size was determined by using the modified formulae by Fisher *et al.*, (2003) which is recommended for populations above 10,000.

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{d^2}$$

Where z = 95% , d = 0.05, p= 50%, q= 1-p

$$n = \frac{1.96 \times 1.96 \times 0.50 (1- 0.50)}{0.05 \times 0.05} = 384$$

This sample size was then distributed disproportionally across the 28 companies. Lottery method was used to recruit respondents. This was achieved by making a numbered list of all the employees and number of active accounts in each company. Thereafter using the random function in Microsoft excel, the researcher selected a number equal to the sample size. This ensured that the sample in the study is truly random and representative.

2.4. Data Collection

A semi structured questionnaire was used as the choice instrument for data collection. The researcher had two questionnaires: one for the employees and another for the customers. A pre-test was carried out in the study to gauge the fitness of the questionnaire in the study. The validity of the research instrument was tested through expert opinion and pre-testing methods. Cronbach's Alpha was used to do a reliability investigation of the survey or other research instrument. A dependability coefficient of 0.70 or above is deemed optimal by Bell et al. (2022). The study adopted the drop and pick method to deliver the questionnaire during data collection

2.5. Data Analysis and Presentation

The primary instrument for directing the analysis was the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) programme. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the study of the data. Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation data were all part of the descriptive statistics. Regression analysis was also conducted. The p values from the regression analysis were used to test the hypothesis. Significance was determined at p<0.05. Data presentation was done through tables and figures. The figures included pie charts, bar charts and histograms. Tables included frequency distribution tables, tables capturing descriptive statistics and other.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by KeMU. Permission to collect data was obtained from the management of the participating companies. Participation in the study was voluntary whereby only willing respondents were involved in the study. Respondents were required to provide verbal consent to confirm their participation. Respondents in the study were kept anonymous and as such their details such as names and contacts were not collected. Data once collected was treated with confidentiality and was only be accessible to the researcher and his supervisors. The data and study results were only be used for academic purposes.

3. RESULTS

A total of 353 employees and 384 customers of Water and sewerage companies in Mt Kenya Region also took part in the study. This response rate is deemed high enough to justify generalisation of the study results. The reason for this determination is because the response rate in this study is higher than the 70% recommended by Orodho (2005) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2012).

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

In order to describe the sample, the researcher collected data on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The results are presented in this section. The researcher collected the demographic characteristics of the respondents. This included their gender, role in the company, working experience and level of education. Majority (61.8%) of the respondents in the study were male. Just over half (58.6%) of the respondents had a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. As shown in table 1, 61.2% were in middle level management in their company. Most (58.9%) of the respondents had a working experience of 5 years of below. These results demonstrate that the sample was adequately represented in terms of working experience, level of education and roles in the company to enable collection of reliable information.

Table1. *Demographic Characteristics of the Employees*

		N	%
Indicate your gender	Female	135	38.2%
	Male	218	61.8%
Indicate your position in the organization	Low Level Management/ Supervisor	68	19.3%
	Middle Level Management	216	61.2%
	Top Level Management	69	19.5%
Indicate the number of years worked in the company	0-5 years	208	58.9%
	11-15 years	77	21.8%
	6-10 years	68	19.3%
Indicate the highest level of education that you have completed	Degree	207	58.6%
	Diploma	77	21.8%
	Master's degree	69	19.5%

The researcher also collected data on the customers' demographic characteristics. This included their gender, age, education and the Length of time as a customer. Most (51.3%) of the respondents in the study were female whereas men made up 48.7% of the sample. As shown in table 2, 38% and 28.4% were in the 31 to 40 and 41- and 50-years age groups. The results show that 37.2% and 21.9% had a bachelor's degree and diploma respectively. The results show that 35.7% of the respondents had been customers of their water company for over 15 years while 24% and 23.4% of the respondents had been customer for between 6 and 10 years and between 11 and 15 years respectively. The results demonstrate that the majority of the customers in this study had been customers of Water and sewerage companies in Mt Kenya Region long enough to enable them know about the companies' service delivery.

Table2. Demographic Characteristics of Customers

		n	%
Gender	Female	197	51.3%
	Male	187	48.7%
Age	18 – 20 years	9	2.3%
	21-30 years	93	24.2%
	31-40 years	146	38.0%
	41-50 years	109	28.4%
	51-60 years	27	7.0%
Length of time as a customer	0 – 5 years	65	16.9%
	11– 15 years	90	23.4%
	6 – 10 years	92	24.0%
	Above 15 years	137	35.7%
Education	Bachelor’s Degree	143	37.2%
	Certificate	13	3.4%
	Diploma	84	21.9%
	Higher Diploma	63	16.4%
	Postgraduate degree	81	21.1%

3.2. Communication Strategy

The study also aimed to determine the influence of communication strategy on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region. To describe the communication strategies in the participating companies, respondents in the study were asked questions to do with information channels, effective feedback, timeliness of information, participation of members and utilization of informal routes. Majority (61.8%) of the respondents agreed that their organization exploits a variety of channels to ensure that information about change effectively reaches the employees. An equal number (61.8%) also agreed that their organization’s management provides effective feedback on issues raised by employees regarding change initiatives being implemented. Majority (81.3%) of the respondents indicated that the organization ensures timely relay of information to employees as and when new issues concerning change initiatives arise in the firm. Majority (61.8%) also agreed that employees and all stakeholders are part and parcel of the communication system utilized by the firm meaning that information regarding change flows in either direction. The results also show that 81.3% of the respondents agreed that the organization makes use of both formal and informal communication routes to ensure effective and efficient relay of information regarding change. Respondents in the study were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the communication strategy in their organisation.

Table3. Communication Strategy

	Agree	Disagree
The organization exploits a variety of channels to ensure that information about change effectively reaches the employees.	61.8%	38.2%
The organization’s management provides effective feedback on issues raised by employees regarding change initiatives being implemented.	61.8%	38.2%
The organization ensures timely relay of information to employees as and when new issues concerning change initiatives arise in the firm.	81.3%	18.7%
The employees and all stakeholders are part and parcel of the communication system utilized by the firm meaning that information regarding change flows in either direction.	61.8%	38.2%
The organization makes use of both formal and informal communication routes to ensure effective and efficient relay of information regarding change.	81.3%	18.7%

Results show that 80.5% rated their satisfaction with the communication strategy in their organisation as high. The results therefore show that the organisations in the study had a communication strategy and employed various communication channels. The results also showed that there was high satisfaction with the communication strategy. This result is similar to Soyinka (2020) study which discovered that communication in Iroko TV is characterised by the 7C’s framework which has enhanced the performance of staff, employees had become more productive in keeping up to task,

meeting daily, having harmonious coordination between employer-employees and further enhancing organisational values and ethics. It is also similar to findings of Bergman et al. (2016) whereby meetings were viewed not only as an opportunity to communicate information top down but also a means by which employees could influence decision-making and development at the workplace.

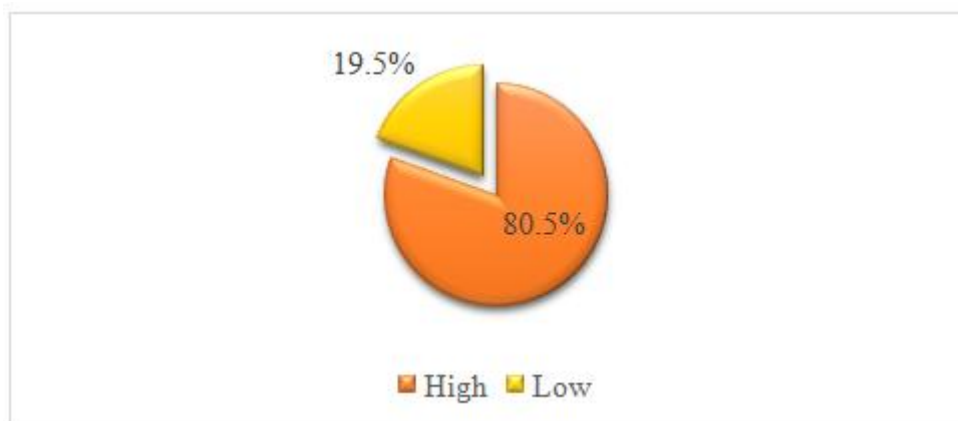


Figure1. *Respondents' Satisfaction with Employee Empowerment*

3.3. Service Delivery

Since the purpose of this study was to determine the influence of human resource change management practices on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region, the researcher sought to assess the level of service delivery. The results are presented in this section. Employees in this study were asked to rate the service delivery in their company. Majority (79.5%) of the respondents indicated that the service delivery in their company was high.

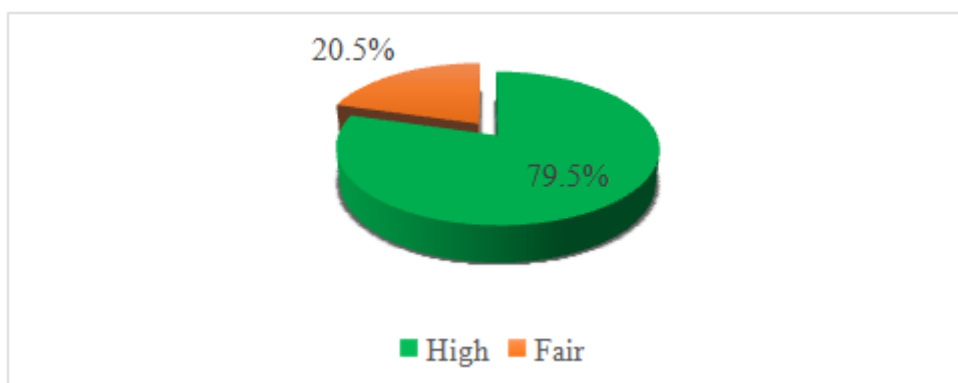


Figure2. *Employees Rating of Service Delivery*

In order to measure customer satisfaction, customers in the study were asked to rate the safety, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy of the services provided by their water companies. Majority (82.3%) of the respondents indicated that the water delivered by the company is safe for consumption. Majority (71.6%) agreed that water supply was consistent and reliable. Similarly, 75% agreed that water pressure was sufficient for their needs. However, only 41.6% agreed that the company provides adequate sewerage services to the residents in their area of operation to which 29.7% disagreed. Similarly, 46.6% disagree that the company responds quickly to customer complaints and service requests to which 43.7% agreed. Most (53.7%) of the respondents agree that the company is transparent in their operations and communicates effectively with customers. Similarly, 58.1% agreed that the company's staff are knowledgeable and helpful when dealing with customers. Overall, 64.4% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the overall service provided by the company. This is similar to Lyimo (2022) study findings which revealed a significant relationship between reliability of water supply and sanitation services and customer satisfaction. Results of Ong et al. (2023) also showed that having an affordable water service, providing accurate water bills, on-time completion of repairs and installations, intermittent water

interruptions and professional employees contribute to the general satisfaction. This result however differs with a findings from a mixed-methods study in four districts of Malawi which showed that both technical and financial performance under community management is weak. Maintenance is rarely done, repairs are slow and sub-standard, and user committees are unable to collect and save funds (Chowns, 2015).

Table4. *Customer Satisfaction*

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
The water delivered by the company is safe for consumption.	82.3%	8.3%	9.3%
The water supply is consistent and reliable.	71.6%	6.0%	22.4%
The water pressure is sufficient for our customer's needs	75.0%	15.6%	9.4%
The company provides adequate sewerage services to the residents in their area of operation.	41.6%	28.6%	29.7%
The company responds quickly to customer complaints and service requests.	43.7%	9.6%	46.6%
The company is transparent in their operations and communicates effectively with customers.	57.3%	18.8%	23.9%
The company's staff are knowledgeable and helpful when dealing with customers.	58.1%	16.7%	25.3%
Overall, I am satisfied with the overall service provided by the company.	64.4%	12.8%	22.9%

3.4. Influence of Communication Strategy on Service Delivery

Regression analysis was carried out between scores of communication strategy on service delivery. Table 5 shows the model summary. The R value is approximately 0.906. This indicates a strong positive correlation between the communication strategy and service delivery. the R squared value is approximately 0.820, which means that about 82% of the variance in service delivery can be explained by the communication strategy in the model. In summary, the model summary suggests that the communication strategy has a strong positive influence on service delivery.

Table5. *Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.906 ^a	.820	.819	2.00987
a. Predictors: (Constant), Communication				

The ANOVA table provides information about the significance of the overall regression model and the individual contributions of the regression and residuals to the total variation in the dependent variable. The F-statistic of 1599.012 is associated with a very low p-value (Sig. = .000), which indicates that the regression model is highly significant. In other words, the communication strategy (the predictor) is contributing significantly to explaining the variance in service delivery. In conclusion, the ANOVA results provide strong evidence that the communication strategy significantly influences service delivery, as indicated by the extremely low p-value associated with the F-statistic.

Table6. *ANOVA*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6459.319	1	6459.319	1599.012	.000 ^b
	Residual	1417.888	351	4.040		
	Total	7877.207	352			
a. Dependent Variable: Service_Delivery						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Communication						

The communication strategy coefficient has a t-value of 39.988 and a p-value of .000. This indicates high statistical significance. The beta coefficient associated with the communication strategy predictor. The estimated coefficient is 0.774. This means that for every one-unit increase in the communication strategy score, the estimated average service delivery score increases by 0.774 units. In summary, the Coefficients table confirms that the communication strategy is a highly significant predictor of service delivery, with a positive coefficient of 0.774. This means that improving the communication strategy is associated with higher levels of service delivery.

Table 7. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.961	.241		-12.303	.000
	Communication	.774	.019	.906	39.988	.000
a. Dependent Variable: e						

4. DISCUSSION

The hypothesis of the study stated that communication strategy has no significant influence on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region. Communication strategy in the study was significant ($p=0.000$). The fourth hypothesis is therefore rejected and the study concludes that communication strategy has a significant influence on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region. This result lends credence to Malek and Yazdanifard (2022) who demonstrated that communication was a crucial lever in organizational change management. The authors noted that effective communication helps in achieving the goal of change management which encompasses maximizing the benefits of a program, project or initiative while minimizing the risks of failure. It agrees with Mutunga (2022) who found that communication had a significant positive affect on quality-of-service delivery in mission hospitals. Effective communication and customer care was lauded as a critical consideration in dealing with clients and was emphasized among all levels of staff of mission hospitals to ensure sustainability of quality service delivery. Hasanaj (2019) study also demonstrated that effective communication is key to the success of a change process. It's key in communicating the objectives of change, enhance engagement and persuade employees to accept the change

5. CONCLUSION

Communication strategy has a significant influence on service delivery in water and sewerage companies in Mount Kenya Region. The study found that communication strategy had a positive and significant influence on service delivery which means that increases in communication strategy results in increased service delivery. Management of water and sewerage companies should therefore provide their managers with the necessary communication. Training managers on effective communication techniques will ensure that messages are heard and understood and that employees feel heard and supported. Employers can also amplify their message through channels like company newsletters or internal social media platforms

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Citation: Grace Nyambura Wachira et al. "Influence of Communication Strategy on Service Delivery in Water and Sewerage Companies in Mount Kenya Region, Kenya" *International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research (IJMSR)*, vol 11, no. 9, 2023, pp. 1-9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0349.1109001>.

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