



**INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT ON ORGANIZATIONAL  
COMMITMENT IN KENYA CIVIL SERVICE**

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**Abstract**

Organizational commitment is a critical element of staff retention and highly associated with intent to leave and actual turnover. Due to lack of commitment, the public service in Kenya has been characterized by exodus of the employees joining the private sector and other employment opportunities. Moreover, services by public organizations have been very poor despite the fact that public services provide enabling environment under which the players in the economy are able to operate effectively and efficiently. There is therefore need to introduce new strategies that will enhance organizational commitment. Sharing power, resources, and knowledge with employees through empowerment serves to increase job satisfaction and commitment. This study aimed to determine the influences of employee psychological empowerment on organizational commitment in Kenya civil service. Among the factors of empowerment the study emphasized on meaning cognition, competence cognition, self-determination cognition and impact cognition which are strategies in employee empowerment that leads to organizational commitment. The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey research approach and used both qualitative and quantitative methods in the selection of the participants and collection of data. Cluster sampling was employed to select 384 respondents from four public organizations in the education sector: Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, Higher Education Loans Board, Teachers Service Commission and Kenya National Examination Council. Data collection instruments included semi-structured questionnaires and document reviews. The collected data was captured in MS Excel and analyzed using SPSS. Inferential data analysis techniques such as regression and correlation analysis were used to analyze the collected data. The analyzed data was presented in suitable graphs and tables.

**Key words:** Organizational commitment, psychological empowerment, meaning cognition, competence cognition, self-determination cognition, impact cognition and Kenya Civil service.

## **Introduction**

Organizational commitment is a critical element of staff retention and highly associated with intent to leave and actual turnover. According to Carriere and Bourque, (2009) employees who are not committed to their organizations are likely to leave the organization. Although turnover is a multi-stage process, low organizational commitment has been shown to have a strong and direct impact on intent to leave and actual turnover in many occupational groups in the civil service (Lambert, Hogan, & Griffin, 2007).

The public service in Kenya has been characterized by exodus of employees joining the private sector and other employment opportunities. Moreover, services by public organizations have been very poor despite the fact that public services provide enabling environment under which the players in the economy are able to operate effectively and efficiently. This has been attributed to poor work performance and lack of commitment (Kipkebut, 2010). The overall effect has been a slow developing economy and an environment that does not attract more investments (World Bank, 2010).

The government in a bid to curb the above effect has reacted by employing ineffective strategies such as; reducing the staff to reduce the wage bill and increase salaries, rationalization of the staff where performance management strategies such as performance scorecard was introduced to monitor and evaluate employee performance and deepening ministerial/departmental rationalization initiatives in which government institutions reviewed their functions, structures and staffing with the aim of enhancing efficiency and productivity (Kipkebut, 2010). These initiatives

failed to meet the objectives of enhancing service delivery and productivity as the solutions were prone to biasness due to political influence and favoritism. The above situation calls for public organizations to introduce new strategies that will enhance organizational commitment and improve the productivity and service delivery in the public sector.

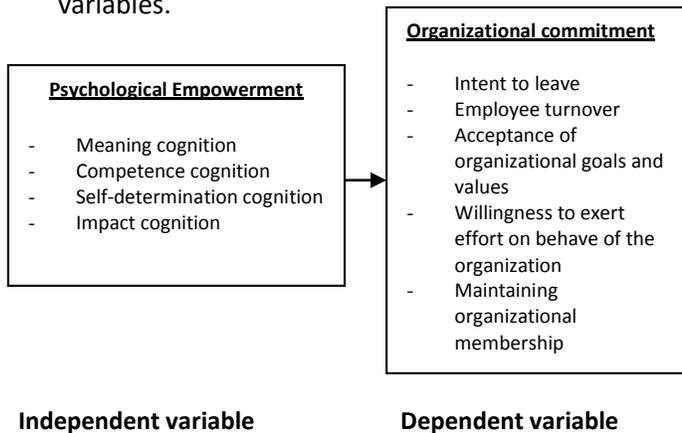
## **Literature Review**

The psychological approach to empowerment focuses on enabling followers, rather than simply delegating or transferring “power” to them (Spreitzer, 1995). The psychological approach focuses on the motivational constructs involved in enhancing personal efficacy and enhancing one’s sense of meaning and control (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Power and control are seen as motivational states that are internal to the individual (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Numerous studies have defined psychological empowerment as intrinsic task motivation (for example, Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) or motivation reflecting the person-environment fit (Zimmerman, 1990). On the other hand, Brymer (1991), defined empowerment as the process of decentralizing decision-making in an organization, by means of which managers give more discretion and autonomy to the frontline employees. Although empowerment has been defined in numerous ways, most authors agree that the core element of empowerment involves giving employee discretion (or latitude) over certain task related activities without neglecting the responsibilities that come along with it (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995). Psychological empowerment has four dimensions: meaning,

competence, impact, and self-determination (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

A conceptual framework was developed based on Vachakariat (2008), which was used in the study to understand the relationship of the variables.



### Meaning cognition

Meaning cognition is defined as a sense of purpose or personal connection to the work goal (Spreitzer, 1995). However, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define meaning as the value of a work goal or purpose, judged relative to an individual's own ideal. Although Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995) use different words to define meaning, their conceptualization of meaningfulness concerns the value of the task, goal or purpose, the feeling that a vocation is important and there is genuine concern about the job. It can also be described as the opportunity to pursue a worthy goal; that what one is engaged in is worth the time, energy and effort one puts in and that it is something that really matters.

Pratt and Ashforth (2003) postulate that the individual employees must have a belief in their sense of judgment, values, work role and behaviors with connection to the work or the

employee's must have the opportunity to be guided by their own ideas and standards to evaluate the achievement of the organizational goal or purpose. Organizations have to make sure that the objective of assigned work task is compatible with their employees' value systems, in order to be perceived as meaningful to ensure that employees are motivated and committed to the organization (Lockwood, 2007). Meaning can be found in almost any task, job or organization (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

In empirical studies, meaning has received strong support as being positively associated with organizational commitment. Spreitzer et al. (1997) used two samples to study the relationship between psychological empowerment and performance outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Both samples were from public organizations with high concentration of employees. The government is the largest employer in Kenya with the public organizations having a high concentration of employees. The study by Spreitzer et al. (1997) found out that meaning was related to performance related attributes such as organizational commitment.

Additionally, Carless (2004) also found out that the satisfaction employees gain when they find meaning in their work is significantly related to organizational commitment. Theoretical development in this study indicates that there is a relationship between meaning cognition of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment and empirical results have found meaning to be positively related to organizational commitment; therefore, in this study, I predict that meaning is positively associated with organizational commitment for

employees in the public service in Kenya. Therefore:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between meaning cognition and organizational commitment where employees have sense of intrapersonal reward, personal identity and integrity that energizes the workers and motivates them to do their best.*

### **Competence cognition**

Competence is defined as a sense of belief that the employees have in their skills and capability to perform their work better (Spreitzer, 1995). Competence dimension is also defined as the degree to which an individual employee is able to perform the task activities skillfully (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). According to White as cited in Van-eeden (2009), competence refers to an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment.

Harter as cited in Van-eeden (2009) described effectance motivation (that is competence motivation) as referring to several facets of the motive: the organism's desire to produce an effect on the environment; the added goal of dealing effectively or competently with the environment; and the resulting feelings of efficacy. Harter distinguished between separate competence domains or skill areas, namely cognitive, social and physical. White as cited in Van-eeden (2009), placed most of his emphasis on successful mastery attempts, while Harter argued that one needs a sufficient degree of failure to get the negative feedback, which clarifies what is competent or successful behavior. Harter also refined the notion that success leads to intrinsic motivation – a feeling of efficacy produced by the successful task accomplishment itself. She suggested a positive linear relationship between the degree of

challenge presented by the mastery situation and the amount of satisfaction derived from tasks successfully solved.

However, one attaches a somewhat negative subjective evaluation to one's performance on very difficult tasks, which one may eventually complete successfully, due to the amount of time and effort spent. Tasks beyond one's capability, which cannot be mastered, produce no pleasure (Van-eeden, 2009). According to Krishna (2007), high self-efficacy will result in initiating behaviors, willingness to exert more effort and persistence in the face of obstacles. However, if employees have low self-efficacy, they will tend to avoid confronting their fears and improve their perceived competencies.

According to Spreitzer (1995), competence is an individual's feeling that they have the ability to perform their work well. Specifically, this dimension of psychological empowerment is comprised of one's belief that he or she has the ability and technical competence necessary to complete the required tasks without resistance from the organization. Therefore:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between competence cognition and organizational commitment when the employees believe that they have the skills and capability to perform their work better, they have a desire to produce an effect on the organization and when they have feelings of efficacy.*

### **Self-determination cognition**

Self-determination is a sense of freedom or autonomy about how individuals do their own work (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). If employees feel a sense of empowerment, they must have a substantial autonomy or power to make decision about

their work. When employees believe that they are just following the order from their superior, then they will not feel a sense of empowerment due to the little autonomy and freedom given. Self-determination exists when employees have some control over what they do, how much effort should be put in their work, and when they have a say in when to start and stop their task (Krishna, 2007).

From the perspective of civil servants, organizations should give employees the freedom in completing the assigned task such as conducting general functions in the office, administrative work and supervision. This assertion stems, from the argument by Aryee and Chen (2006) that employees tend to understand their jobs better than their supervisors, and therefore, the employees are more likely to recognize the factors influencing work performance and to know how to resolve the issue. When self-determination is offered to employees, they can then complete their work more effectively (Humborstad and Perry, 2011). Self-determination can enable individuals to be more interested in their work and to be optimistic even when difficulties arise. When individuals perceive little self-determination from their work, they tend to feel helpless (Humborstad & Perry, 2011).

Additionally, regarding motivation, Li et al. (2006) posit that that when employees have more self-determination about how to complete their work, they have higher work motivation and finish the task more effectively. Self-determination therefore encompasses employees' sense of control over how their work is done. Li et al. (2006) argued that empowerment dealt with the efforts of individuals and groups to increase their control. They explain this as being able to initiate and

regulate personal behavior. In other words, employees with self-determination have some control over what they will do, how much effort they will put in, and when they will start and stop (Humborstad and Perry, 2011).

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) have argued that the element of self-determination is related to use of autonomy where employees are able to act on behalf of the company, which is further associated with organization commitment and job satisfaction. Self-determination is also related to perceived control encouraging organizational commitment (Spreitzer et al., 1997). Considering the theoretical definitions of self-determination, and the empirical arguments described above, self-determination is likely to be positively associated with organizational commitment. Therefore the following hypothesis is proposed to guide this study:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between self-determination cognition and organizational commitment since the employees feel a greater sense of autonomy because they feel they are free to make independent decisions and take on initiative without pressure from the organization, resulting in a greater sense of accountability and responsibility.*

### **Impact cognition**

Impact describes a belief that individual employee can influence the system in which they are embedded (Spreitzer, 1995). Impact meant that whether employees believe they are able to make a difference in their organization. In other words, impact is the degree to which employees can influence organization strategy, administrative or operating outcomes at work (Krishna, 2007). Thomas & Velthouse (1990) on the other hand, defines impact cognition as the

perception that one's behavior has an effect on one's task environment. Additionally, they argue that impact cognition is the perception of environmental resistance to personal impact regardless of ability. Impact cognition is therefore distinct from competence cognition where a person feels that they could perform if given the opportunity.

In terms of psychological empowerment, impact has been referred to as the converse of learned helplessness in a work setting (Spreitzer, 1995). Ashforth (1989) suggests that impact is the ability to influence work outcomes, whether strategic, administrative, or operational. The effect of impact on nonstandard workers is less clear than the other psychological empowerment cognitions. However, Ashforth (1989) argues that a lack of opportunity for impact at work is negatively related to employee satisfaction and commitment to their duties and hence low productivity. This follows that when impact exists, employees would feel that they could perform better and have significant influence in the organization. Therefore managers need to affirm their employees that they can affect the organization outcome by completing the assigned tasks. Managers should provide their subordinates substantial opportunities to give opinions and suggestions about their operational changes in their work environment. This will have positive impact on their work outcomes. These findings provide an opportunity to test this relationship with employees in the public service in Kenya. Therefore:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between impact cognition and organizational commitment where people feel they have important influence on their immediate work*

*environments, co-workers and the organization as a whole hence committed in delivering organizational objectives.*

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

The study used the cross-sectional descriptive survey research design to assess the influence of access to opportunity on organizational commitment in the Kenya civil service. This study therefore, sought to find out and analyze the opinion of the employees in the Kenya civil service on the influence of employee psychological empowerment on organizational commitment. The design was suitable for the proposed study because it attempted to determine current status of the phenomenon. Orodho (2005) affirms that surveys are useful in describing opinions, beliefs and knowledge of certain phenomenon in society.

### **Target population**

The target population included staff of the selected public organizations. The selected public organizations were the major institutions in the education sector. They include; Teachers Service Commission (TSC), Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC), Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and Higher Education Loans Board (HELB). These are the public service delivery organizations in the education sector. Service based government institutions in the education sector have constantly performed poorly for the past three years (GoK, 2012). These organizations provided good representation of factors affecting service delivery in the Kenyan Civil Service.

### **Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

The study used cluster sampling techniques to select the civil servants from the selected organizations who participated in the study. The Fishers formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size of this study. This is because the target population consists of a large number of units (Civil servants in the education sector) (Yates, 2004). The researcher assumed 95% desired level of confidence, which is equivalent to standardized normal deviate value of 1.96, and an acceptable margin of error of 5% (standard value of 0.05).

$$n = Z^2pq/d^2$$

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The study collected both primary and secondary data. Semi-structured questionnaires were the research instrument used to collect primary data. Secondary data was collected through document reviews and analysis. Sources of secondary data include published books, journals, magazines and the internet. The semi-structured questionnaires were used to obtain information from the staff members. It was designed to contain both open and close-ended questions, the Psychological Empowerment Scale constructed by Spreitzer (1995) was used to guide the formulation of a questionnaire to measure psychological empowerment. It is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure the four dimensions of psychological empowerment conceptualized by Thomas and Velthouse (1990): meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. This instrument consisted of 12 items, 3 items for each dimension of psychological empowerment, measured on a Likert-like scale (5= strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree).

### **Measurement of Psychological Empowerment**

Meyer and colleagues (1993) developed the Commitment to Organizations instrument. They tested and extended a three-component conceptualization from two samples: student nurses and registered nurses. The tool includes six factors: Factors 1, 2, and 3 reflect affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the occupation; and factors 4, 5, and 6 reflect affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization.

In this study the instrument was used albeit with some modification to fit the objective of the current study. This study focuses on measuring affective, continuance, normative and the three factors of organizational commitment. Therefore statements that were developed by Meyer et al., (1993) of organizational commitment were used. The researcher involved the supervisors in reviewing the modifications for the instruments, as shown on the conceptual framework.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

Data analysis and presentation were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Qualitative data obtained from questionnaires was edited/cleaned and classified into classes or groups with common characteristics or themes. The content within the themes was then analyzed guided by the research objectives. Quantitative data was analyzed and interpreted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Inferential data analysis techniques such as regression and factor analysis were also used to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to show the inherent relationship between variables and the research questions in the proposed study. The SPSS was used to generate suitable graphs and tables. Results were then be analyzed in order

to draw conclusions and present the research findings.

The study used multi-linear regression analysis to test the statistical significance of the independent variable (psychological empowerment) on the dependent variable (organizational commitment).

The following formula for the regression model was used to analyze the relationship:

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

Where; Y = Organizational commitment in the Kenya Civil Service.

$\beta_0$  = The constant or coefficient of intercept.

$X_1$  = Psychological empowerment

$\epsilon$  = Error factor

$\beta_1 - \beta_2$  = Correlation coefficients

The regression analysis of organizational commitment on employee psychological empowerment showed that;

There was a positive (regression weight = 0.31) and significant (critical ratio=5.824) relationship between Competence cognition and affective organizational commitment. 10% of the variance ( $R^2=0.10$ ) in the affective organizational commitment is explained by Competence cognition.

There was a positive (regression weight = 0.28) and significant (critical ratio=5.111) relationship between Impact cognition and affective organizational commitment. The relationship between Impact cognition and normative Organizational Commitment is positive (regression weight = 0.18) and significant (critical ratio=3.191). Impact cognition explains

8% of the variance ( $R^2=0.08$ ) in the affective organizational commitment. Impact cognition also explains 3% of the variance ( $R^2=0.03$ ) in the normative organizational commitment.

There was a positive (regression weight = 0.18) and significant (critical ratio=3.307) relationship between Meaning Cognition and affective organizational commitment. Meaning cognition explains 3% of the variance ( $R^2=0.03$ ) in the affective organizational commitment.

There was a positive (regression weight = 0.18) and significant (critical ratio=3.269) relationship between Self-determination Cognition and affective organizational commitment. Self-determination Cognition explains 3% of the variance ( $R^2=0.03$ ) in the affective organizational commitment.

### Summary of the Findings

The factors considered on influence of employee psychological empowerment on organizational commitment were; meaning cognition, competence cognition, self-determination cognition and impact cognition

The finding on meaning cognition showed that, employees who have meaning cognition significantly influence their commitment to the organization. For example most of the respondents agreed; that the objective of the tasks assigned to them in their organization is compatible with their value systems; that they have the opportunity to be guided by their own ideas and standards in the achievement of their organizational goals; that employees in their organization belief in their sense of judgment, values, work role and behaviors with connection to the work; that they feel and regularly act on behalf of a greater good in their organization; that they are involved in

something that really matters in their organization; that they always engaged in activities that are worth their time, energy and effort in their organization; that in their organization, they have an opportunity to pursue a worthy goal and that their vocation is important and there is genuine in their job.

The findings on competence cognition showed that there is significance influence on employee competence cognition on organizational commitment. For example most of the respondents agreed; that employees in their organization are willing to exert more effort and persistence in the face of obstacles; that they always desire to produce an effect on the environment of their organization; that there is learning in their environment of work that is focused and carried out with persistence; that they have the capacity to interact effectively with the environment surrounding their job and duties; that they are always able to perform the task activities related to their job skillfully and that they have a strong belief in their skills and capability to perform their work better.

The findings on self-determination cognition showed that there is significance influence on employee self-determination cognition on organizational commitment. For example most of the respondent agreed; that they are more interested in their work and are optimistic even when difficulties arise; that employees in their organization are always able to complete their work more effectively; that employees in their organization have the freedom in completing the assigned task such as conducting general functions in the office, administrative work and supervision; that they have some control over what they do in their organization; that they have some control on how much effort they should put in their work; that they have some

control on when to start and stop their task and that employees in their organization have sense of freedom or autonomy about how they do their own work.

The findings on impact cognition, most of the respondents disagreed that they have opportunities to give opinions and suggestions about their operational changes and their work environment. Some respondents agreed that employees in their organization feel that they could perform better and have significant influence in the organization. Some respondents disagreed they are able to influence organization strategy, administrative or operating outcomes at work. Most of the respondents disagreed that they are able to make a difference in their organization and most of the respondents agreed that they can influence the system in which they are embedded.

Since psychologically empowered workers feel competent and confident to influence their job and work environment in a meaningful way, they are likely to be proactive and innovative (Boudrias, Gaudreau, Savoie & Morin, 2009). Besides, there is a constant pressure on management to reduce costs and increase productivity, which is possible only through a satisfied and committed workforce. The above literature on physiological empowerment sub-dimensions and their relationship to employees' ability to perform and deliver on the organizational objectives, reveals that psychologically empowered employees are more likely to get commitment in delivering their organizational goals compared with less psychologically empowered employees.

According to Spreitzer (1995), individuals who are psychologically empowered believe that

they do make a difference. They feel that their work has an important impact on others and that their contributions are taken seriously. In addition, workers perceive themselves as active participants in shaping organizational outcomes and they believe that they have a significant influence in the culture of the organization. These workers perceive a sense of personal control and feel empowered to act and therefore are more committed to their organization.

The results of the study were in consistent with most findings from other studies that consistently emphasized on the significance of employee psychological empowerment on organizational commitment (Lockwood, 2007; Krishna, 2007; Humborstad & Perry, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of employees' psychological empowerment on organizational commitment in Kenya Civil Service. Where the findings indicated that there was a significant influence of employees' psychological empowerment on organizational commitment, through the four dimensions: meaning, competence, impact, and self-determination cognition as shown by (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Meaning Cognition was assessed using eight statements on five point likert scale. Respondents believed that they have meaning in their work thus enhancing their commitment to the organization, for example they agreed that the objective of the tasks assigned to them in their organization is compatible with their value systems, others feel and regularly act on behalf of a greater good of their organization, while others indicated that they always

engaged in activities that are worth their time, energy and effort in their organization, other agreed that in their organization, they have an opportunity to pursue a worthy goal and others agreed that their organization feels that their vocation is important and there is genuine in their job.

Though some did not agree that they have the opportunity to be guided by their own ideas and standards in the achievement of their organizational goals, others were not of the opinion that employees in their organization belief in their sense of judgment, values, work role and behaviors with connection to the work. This is in line with literature that organizations have to make sure that the objective of assigned work task is compatible with their employees' value systems, in order to be perceived as meaningful to ensure that employees are motivated and committed to the organization (Lockwood, 2007). In conclusion meaning cognition is very important as far as employee empowerment is concerned.

Competence cognition was assessed using six statements on five point likert scale. Most of the respondents agreed that employees in their organization are willing to exert more effort and persistence in the face of obstacles, they always desire to produce an effect on the environment of their organization, there is learning in their environment of work that is focused and carried out with persistence, others have the capacity to interact effectively with the environment surrounding their job and duties, others are able to perform the task related to their job skillfully and have a strong belief in their skills and capability to perform their work better. This was in agreement with Krishna (2007), who indicated that there is a positive relationship between competence cognition and

organizational commitment when the employees believe that they have the skills and capability to perform their work better, they have a desire to produce an effect on the organization and when they have feelings of efficacy.

Self determination cognition was assessed using seven statements on five point likert scale. Some of the respondents agreed they are more interested in their work and are optimistic even when difficulties arise, other have control on how much effort they should put in their work and others have control on when to start and stop their task. Similarly, the other half of the respondents disagreed that employees in their organization are always able to complete their work more effectively, that employees in the organization have the freedom in completing the assigned task such as conducting general functions in the office, administrative work and supervision, have control over what they do in their organization and others also disagreed that in their organization they have sense of freedom or autonomy about how they do their own work. This is in agreement with the literature and in conclusion that when self-determination is offered to employees, they can then complete their work more effectively (Humborstad & Perry, 2011). Self-determination can enable individuals to be more interested in their work and to be optimistic even when difficulties arise.

Impact cognition was assessed using seven statements on five point likert scale. Most of the respondents disagreed that they have opportunities to give opinions and suggestions

about their operational changes and their work environment, are able to influence organization strategy and administrative or operating outcomes at work, are able to make a difference in their organization, believe that they can influence the system in which they are embedded. Similarly, some agreed that they could perform better and have significant influence in the organization. Thomas & Velthouse (1990) indicated that impact cognition has an effect on one's task environment. There is a positive relationship between impact cognition and organizational commitment where people feel they have important influence on their immediate work environments, co-workers and the organization as a whole hence committed in delivering organizational objectives. In conclusion, according to the descriptive statistics it shows that employee in Kenya Public Sector lacks impact cognition which negatively influences their commitment in organization.

This study has some limitations. It confined its focus to four institutions in Kenya Civil Service only. Hence, future research should examine influences of employee psychological empowerment on organizational commitment in several organizations in Kenya Civil Service and Public sector. Whereas this research has relied on quantitative approaches to examine influences of employee empowerment on organizational commitment, an in-depth analysis of individual responses can generate useful inductive information and provide a richer understanding of the influences of employee psychological empowerment on organizational commitment.

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